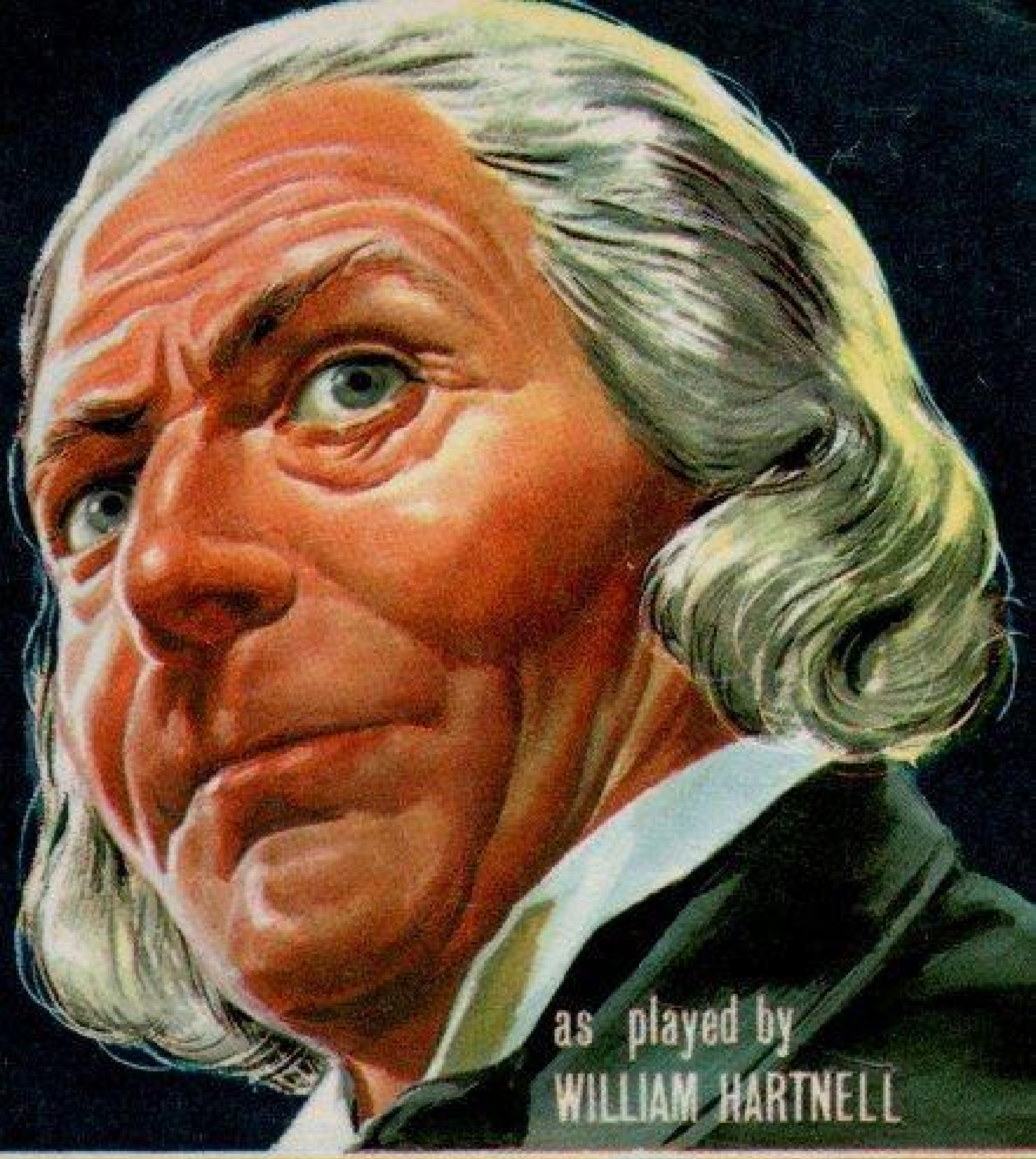
THE DR WHO ANNUAL



as played by
WILLIAM HARTNELL

FASCINATING STORIES OF THE UNKNOWN BASED ON THE FAMOUS TELEVISION SERIES.

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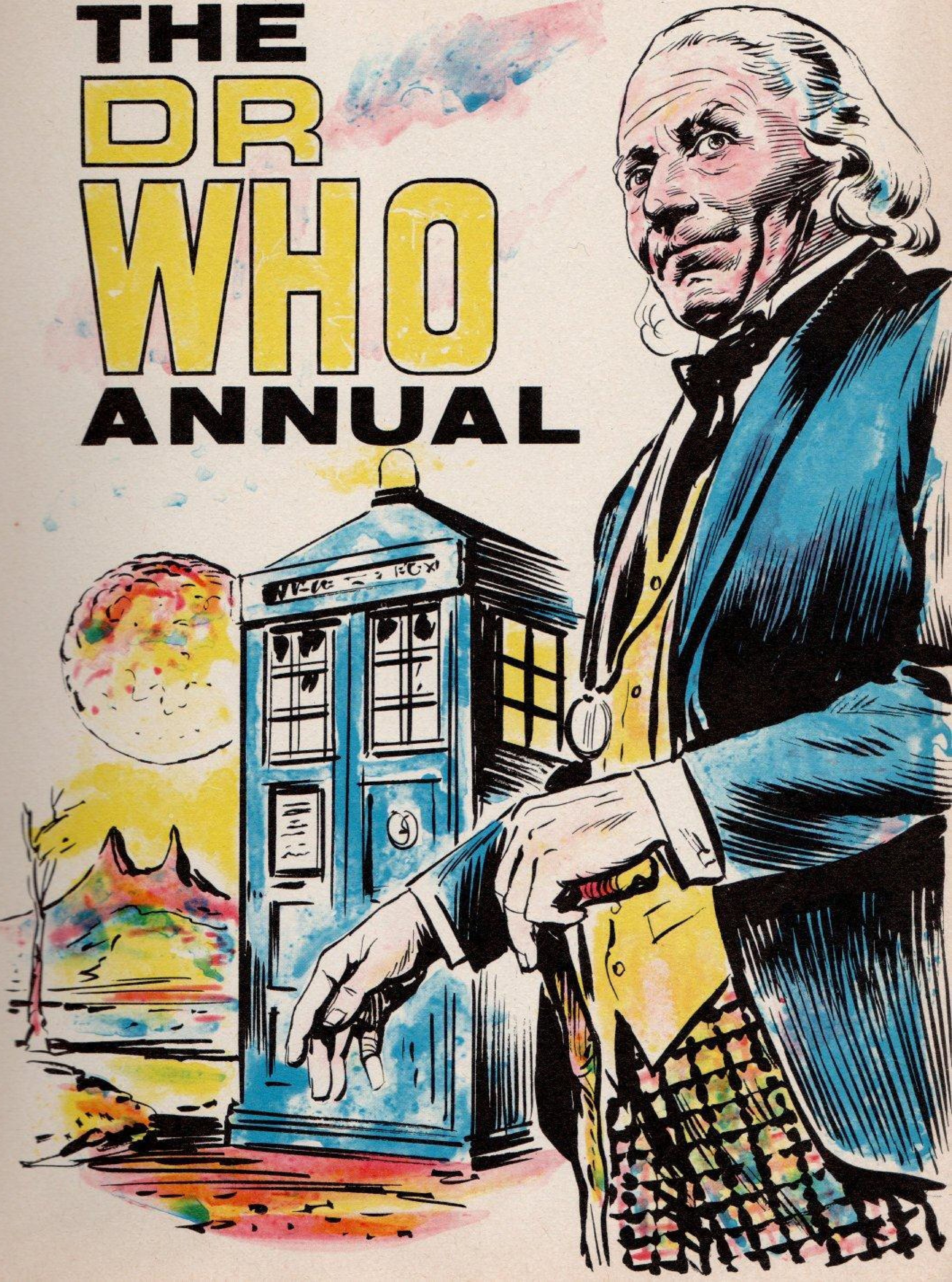

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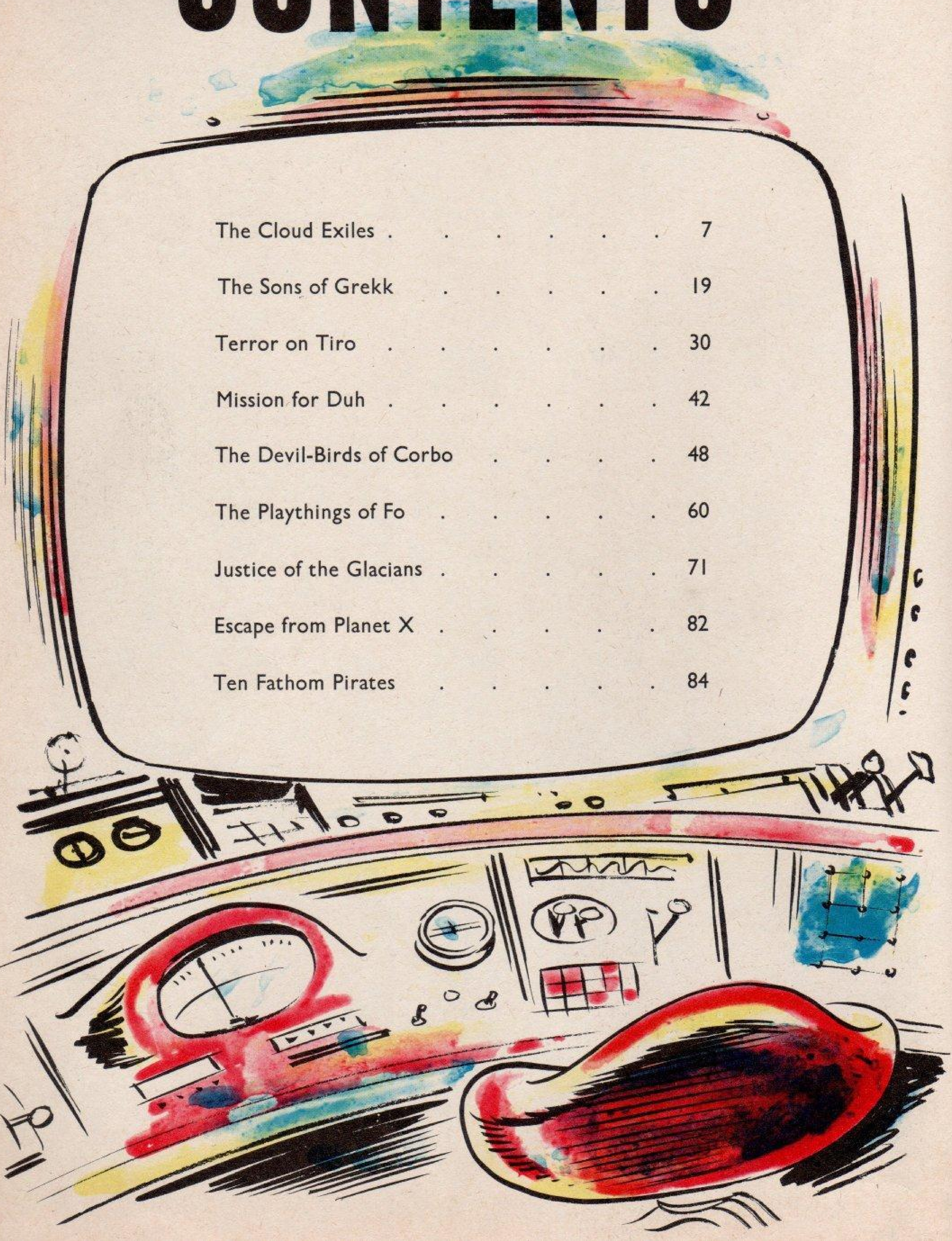
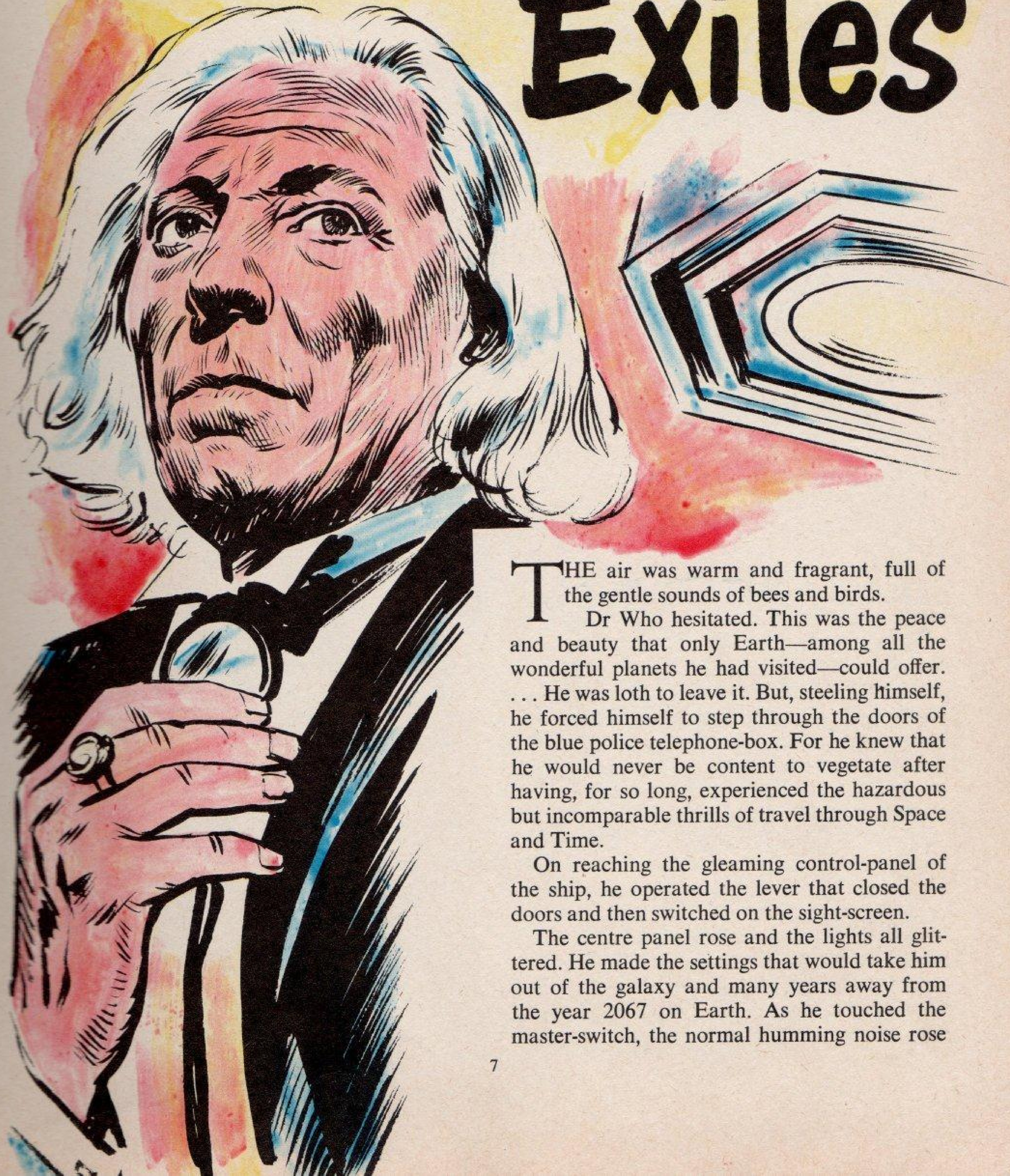


The CLOUD Exiles



THE air was warm and fragrant, full of the gentle sounds of bees and birds.

Dr Who hesitated. This was the peace and beauty that only Earth—among all the wonderful planets he had visited—could offer. . . . He was loth to leave it. But, steeling himself, he forced himself to step through the doors of the blue police telephone-box. For he knew that he would never be content to vegetate after having, for so long, experienced the hazardous but incomparable thrills of travel through Space and Time.

On reaching the gleaming control-panel of the ship, he operated the lever that closed the doors and then switched on the sight-screen.

The centre panel rose and the lights all glittered. He made the settings that would take him out of the galaxy and many years away from the year 2067 on Earth. As he touched the master-switch, the normal humming noise rose and rose in pitch until he could no longer hear it. *Tardis* was off again on another journey in Space and Time.

The grey nothingness of the trans-dimensional flux began to fade from the screen at last. What appeared in its place caused him to exclaim aloud in astonishment. All he could see was a green plain and white puffball clouds, a scene identical to the earthly one he had just left. What had happened? Had *Tardis* not moved? Or had it merely moved in Time, but remained on Earth?

There was nothing for it but to seek the answers outside.

Two . . . three steps he took beyond the door. Then he sank, gasping, to his knees. He fought for breath like a man in a vacuum. With a desperate effort he regained *Tardis*.

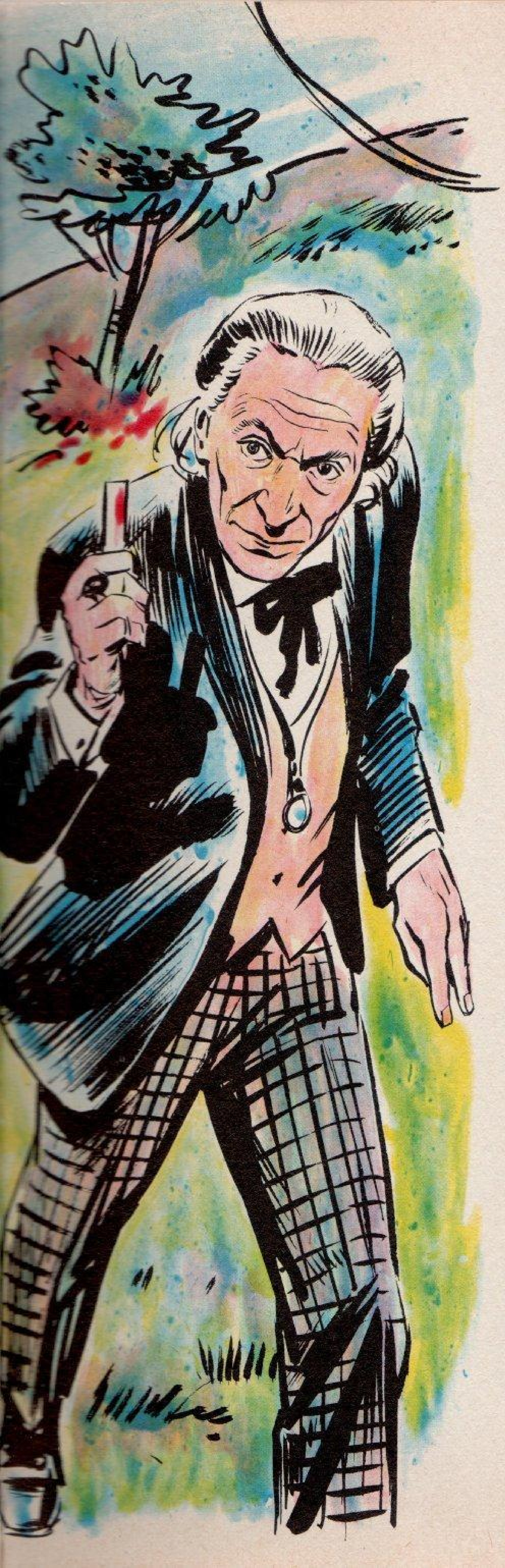
As he lay resting, he chided himself for not testing the atmosphere of this strange new planet before he emerged. It was, of course, the sight of green fields and white clouds which had disarmed his normal caution.

He made his way to his vast laboratory and store-room for his Atmospheric Density Jacket. Then, with the waistcoat-like apparatus strapped over his shoulders, he once more ventured outside the ship.

What he had presumed to be green fields proved instead to be expanses of spongy substance which oozed moisture like moss beneath his feet. For the most part, the area of the planet immediately surrounding *Tardis* was composed of gentle undulations of this spongeous 'grass'. They were ringed by small hills of what could have been grey rock, or even sand dunes.

But what captured his attention and excited his keen scientific brain even more were the clouds. Now that he was outside he could see that they were like no clouds he had seen on Earth. They seemed to be pulsing with an incandescent light—a phenomena all the more striking against the background of a purple, almost black sky.

"It's impossible!" he argued aloud, a trifle sententiously, as if he were arguing a scientific point with a colleague. "Quite impossible for clouds to exist in this rarified atmosphere. Naturally there must be a simple explanation. Possibly some sort of gas riding up from cracks in the surface."



It was then that he noticed movement among the clouds. The astonishing thing was that there was no breeze to account for it, and in any case they were shifting in different directions!

One large white cloud appeared to hang much lower than the others. As he walked towards it he saw that he was right. It hung a mere few feet from the green surface. . . . If he could just take a sample, he thought, then it would be a simple matter to analyse it back in his laboratory.

He fumbled in his pocket for the specimen tubes without which he never went exploring. Taking a handkerchief from his pocket, he tied it round his mouth and nose as a precaution.

Now he was close enough to the cloud to distinguish that its exterior surface was of a silky, smooth texture completely without signs of turbulence. It now lay very close to the ground. Holding the tube before him, he stepped inside the fringe of the cloud. . . .

"Aaagh!" The gasping, choking cry was torn from his lips. He felt power draining from his limbs and his senses slipping rapidly away.

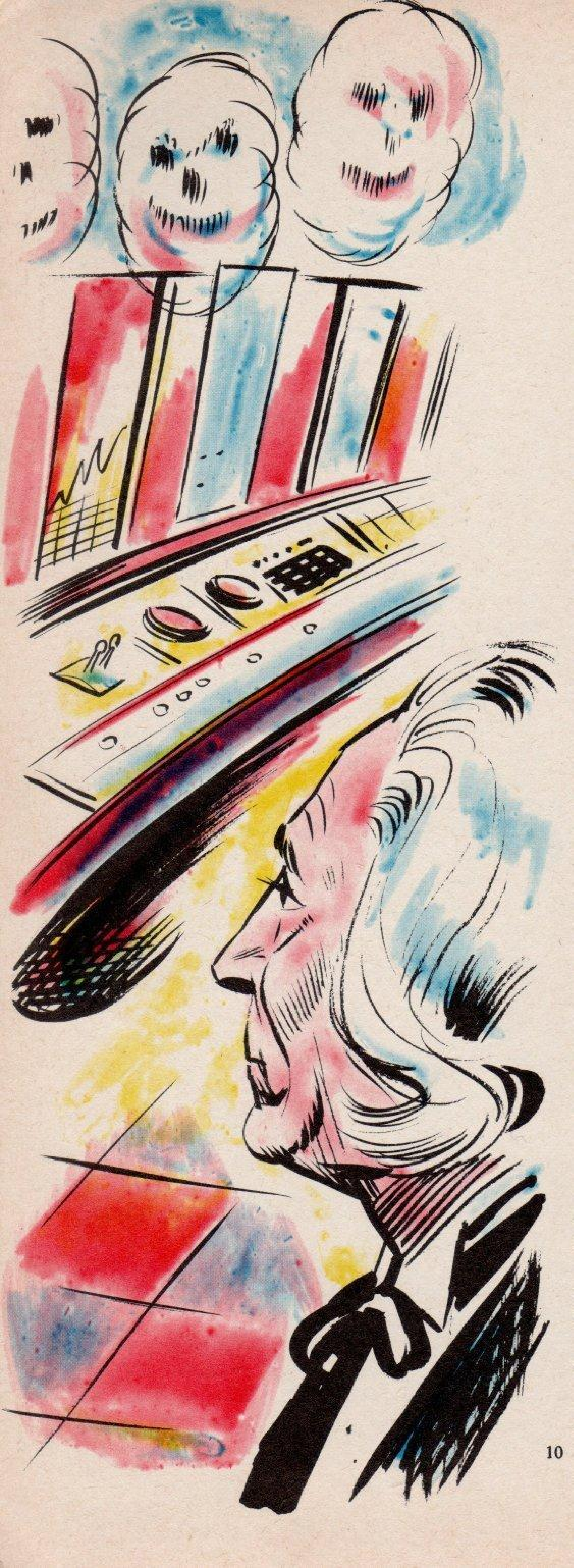
"What—what——?" He mouthed futile words, vaguely aware that he was being wrapped like a cocoon in the cloud. With each incandescent pulse he felt sudden warmth all around him. It was as if the cloud were a living organism!

His mind vainly trying to grasp the enormity of that sudden astounding thought, Dr Who slipped into unconsciousness. . . .

Bright lights beat down upon his face as his senses struggled to emerge from a whirlpool of aching blackness.

With an effort he opened his eyes. He tried to sit up, but found that his limbs were in the iron control of some paralytic force. He could still turn and move his head, however, and looking around he saw that he was lying upon a metal slab in the midst of a scene so fantastic, so impossible, that his mind—innured, though it was, to many unbelievable wonders—now almost refused to accept the evidence of his eyes.

Hovering around him were the clouds. Pulsing with lights, they moved noiselessly, but purposefully. Sometimes they brushed close to their captive, and he could detect a strange pungent odour that seemed to be a blend of ozone and formaldehyde. . . . He wrinkled his



nose and glanced upwards. A vast, arched dome rose above the battery of lights which glared down relentlessly upon him. He appeared to be in a great hall. Turning his head he saw an array of electronic machinery against one wall, and a white cubicle.

Except for the hum of the machinery, there had been no sound.

But now he became aware of whisperings. The voices seemed to hang in the air, and he could make out snatches of what they were saying: ". . . Still alive . . . Good! . . . Humanoid type. . . Wonderful! . . . Prepare the epitomiser!"

Dr Who raised his head and shouted angrily. "Who are you? Release me this instant! D'you hear? I am not hostile. I am a scientist!"

His voice, the first loud noise to break the sepulchral silence, went echoing harshly into the shadowed heights of the hall. The effect was immediate and startling. The clouds drew back, huddling together beside the mass of instruments.

When silence reigned once more the clouds held a sibilant conference. Suddenly one cloud came forward towards the metal slab. Astounded, Dr Who heard a whisper coming from its depths and he saw, within its incandescent pulsing, two eyes looking at him!

"We do not like noise! Must we paralyse you completely?"

Curbing his impatience, and lowering his voice, Dr Who replied: "Forgive me, please. I've come a very long way, millions of light-years in fact. It's—it's rather unnerving to meet——" He hesitated.

The whispering voice said: "We are the Ethereals? But we were not always as nebulous in form as you see us now."

Dr Who's eyes gleamed with interest. "It is astounding! Never in all my travels——"

"You are a traveller?" whispered the cloud.

"A scientist who travels through Time and Space. . . . I am not one whom you need to fear. I wish to be friendly. Will you kindly release me?"

"No!" The whisper was taken up by the others, until that place of echoes hissed like a steam cauldron.

"Why not? Is this any way to treat a visitor to your planet?" protested Dr Who.

"You are to be the key to our salvation," came the reply.

"What do you mean?" Dr Who spoke boldly, but a tremor of fear passed through his helpless body.

"Look at me!" The cloud hovered closer, pulsating at a rapid rate. "Once *I* was a being as solid as you. So were we all. That was long ago—five eketrons ago. Then this planet belonged to us, the Ethereals. We were the masters, and the Baggolts were our slaves."

"The Baggolts? What are they?" asked Dr Who.

"They are robots. We built them, and one of our greatest scientists gave them an electronic brain so keen that it led to the downfall of our race. . . . For, you see, the Baggolts began to think for themselves!"

"Great heavens!" murmured the astonished prisoner.

"They rebelled against us," went on the cloud. "The first one they killed was the scientist who had given them the power to think."

"Why did they not kill you, too?"

Within the cloud two eyes glittered. "We were the victims of one of the Baggolts's experiments. They thought they could get rid of us by vaporising us—but the attempt failed. We were transformed into the nebulous cloud-form in which you now find us. We came to hide in this secret base, which is unknown to the robots. Here we have waited patiently. Time has meant nothing to us. We had the epitomiser, which would one day rescue us. All we needed was a being with a solid form. . . . And then you came!"

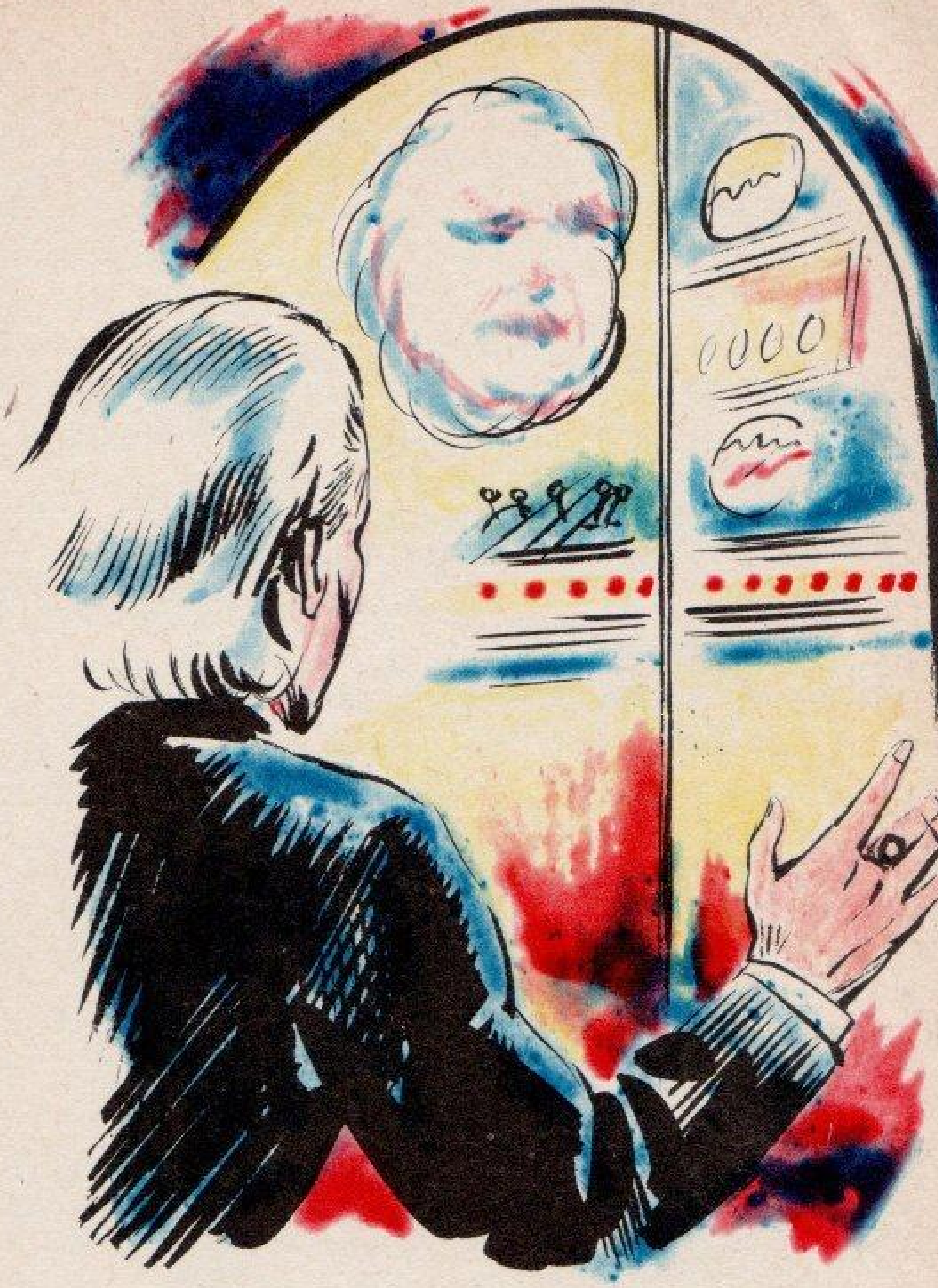
Dr Who fought against the nightmare fears that threatened to engulf him. "What do you mean? What is the epitomiser? And how does it concern me?"

The cloud-being floated away, settling over the white cubicle. "This is the epitomiser. It can de-vaporise us—transform us into solid beings again. But first it must have a mould in which to cast us. *You* will be that mould!"

Dr Who raised his head and roared angrily: "This is preposterous! Let me up from this slab! You cannot do it! I shall resist!"

The echoes thundered angrily and the Ethereals shrank together in fear.

When he could be heard, their spokesman whispered: "We are sorry, my friend. If there was another way to regain our form, you would be spared. But this is our only chance—and we dare not let it go. . . . Come, Ethereals. Place him in the epitomiser."



For a moment Dr Who was tempted to start yelling again. It was, after all, his only weapon against these cloud-beings, at least for as long as he remained paralysed. Then an idea came to him. He lay silent, thinking hard, while two of them approached. He felt himself enveloped in their folds and once again his senses slipped away. . . .

He recovered a few moments later to find, as he expected, that he was inside the cubicle . . . and free to move again. Whatever field of force they had used to keep him powerless before did not operate within the cubicle.

He rose to his feet. Through the transparent doors he could see the clouds hovering around their instrument panels. . . . There was no time to lose!

His escape plan had formed in his brain as he had lain helpless on the metal slab. For he had noticed that the door of the cubicle was secured with an electronic lock. With the help of his super ring, he should be able to free himself within a few seconds. . . .

He tore the ring from his finger and held it close to the lock. At once the splendid stone in the ring began to glow. A high-pitched hum told him that the electronic locking-code was already being rapidly broken down. . . . But would it be done in time?

Lights began to flicker in the instruments in the cubicle, contacts began to click and chatter, and beams began to wink. . . .

For a moment Dr Who was bathed in an eldritch glow. The epitomiser had already begun its deadly work. Its invisible fingers were already probing and recording every cell and tissue of his body. Within minutes he might be transformed into a mere mould, from which a hundred de-vaporised Ethereals would emerge—each one looking exactly like Dr Who!

Suddenly the super ring twisted in his hand. The door flew open. With a gasp of relief Dr Who hurled himself outside the cubicle. Then, remembering the rest of his plan, he began to leap and yell like a Whirling Dervish. The magnified echoes hammered back from the cathedral-like arches of the roof. It was an awful din—and it achieved precisely the results for which he had hoped. Unable to bear the onslaught of noise, the Ethereals huddled back in the farthest corner of their hall.

Dr Who ran to the control panel. It was the work of a moment to rip wires from the main terminal boards. . . .

Then, slipping his super ring back on his finger, Dr Who turned wearily to his captors.

"Ah! Now then, Ethereals!" he panted. "When I get back my breath, perhaps we can discuss your little problem in a civilised manner."

He heard them begin to whisper together, and he sank into a chair to wait. Soon the spokesman approached.

"You said 'discuss our problem'?" it whispered.

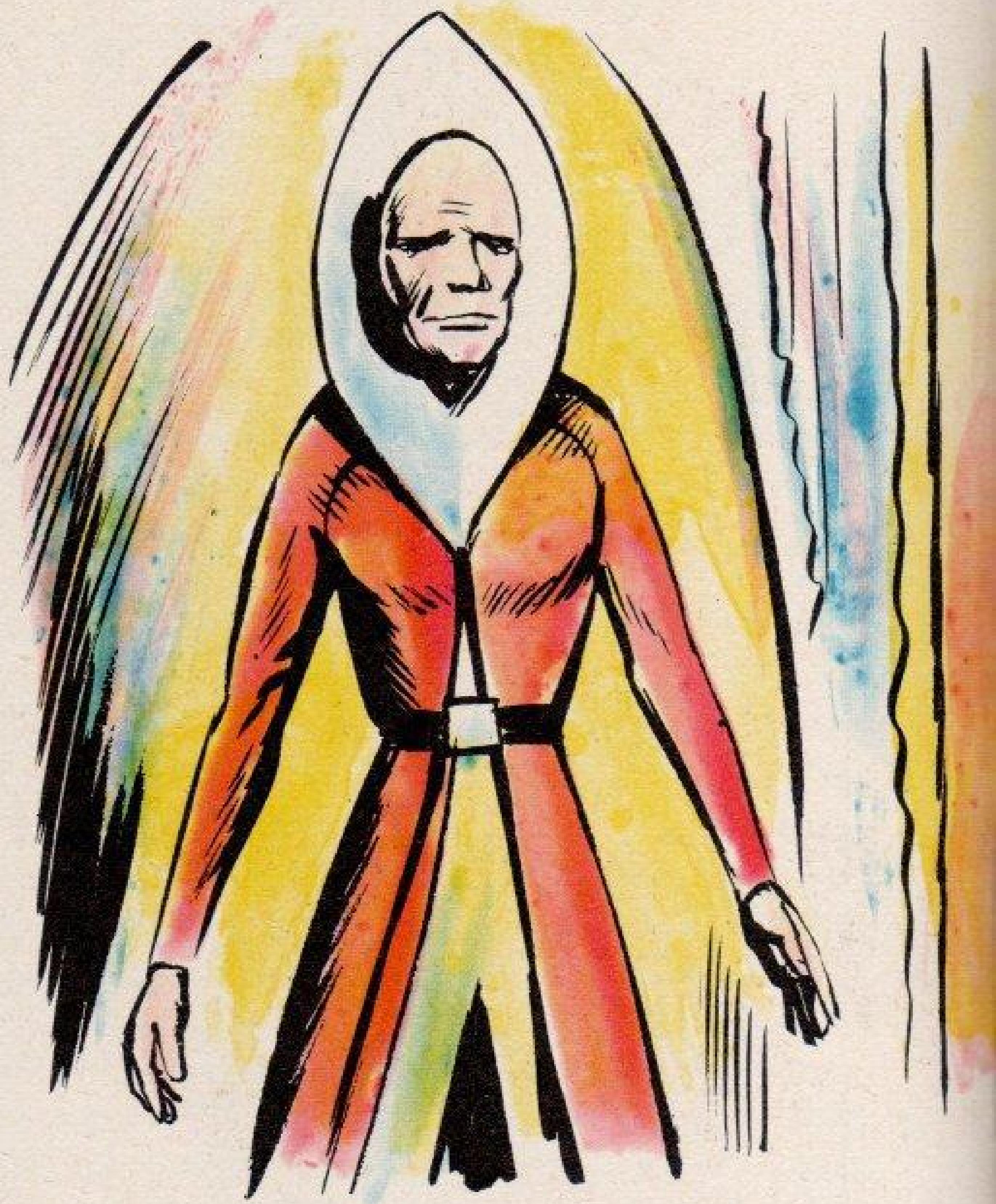
Dr Who nodded impatiently. "Yes, yes. I am quite willing to help you. . . . Obviously I can't leave this planet with robots ruling it. . . . Good gracious me! Where would we be if we allowed robots to take over everything? Eh?"

The incandescent glow grew brighter. "We would have killed you, and yet you are willing to help us?"

Dr Who rose impatiently to his feet, waving a long white hand. "Come, come! I've told you already! Yes. . . . Now, the point is this. I have a good idea how your epitomiser works, and I believe that I can supply a programmed reaction activator which will enable you to become de-vaporised *without* the need of a solid mould!"

He turned away briskly and went to a workbench. The Ethereals flocked round him, their pulsations almost feverish as they whispered their thanks.

Dr Who frowned impatiently at the equipment around him. "No time to lose!" he declared. "This isn't going to be an easy job. I must begin work at once."



For the next few hours the great hall was plunged into silence. Not even the whispers of the Ethereals were allowed to disturb the lone, white-haired figure stooping over the workbench.

As for Dr Who, his concentration was so intense that he was oblivious to his surroundings. He was equally oblivious to the weariness creeping over him. When finally he could fight sleep no longer, a tool slipped from his nerveless fingers and he would have fallen if one of the clouds had not caught him. Aware that he was safe now, Dr Who slept. . . .

He awoke feeling much refreshed, but rather annoyed at having lost valuable time "I do wish you had wakened me," he declared, standing up and turning to the white clouds. "I was almost finished my task when I fell asleep. . . . Well, well. Let me see now. Where was I? Ah yes!"

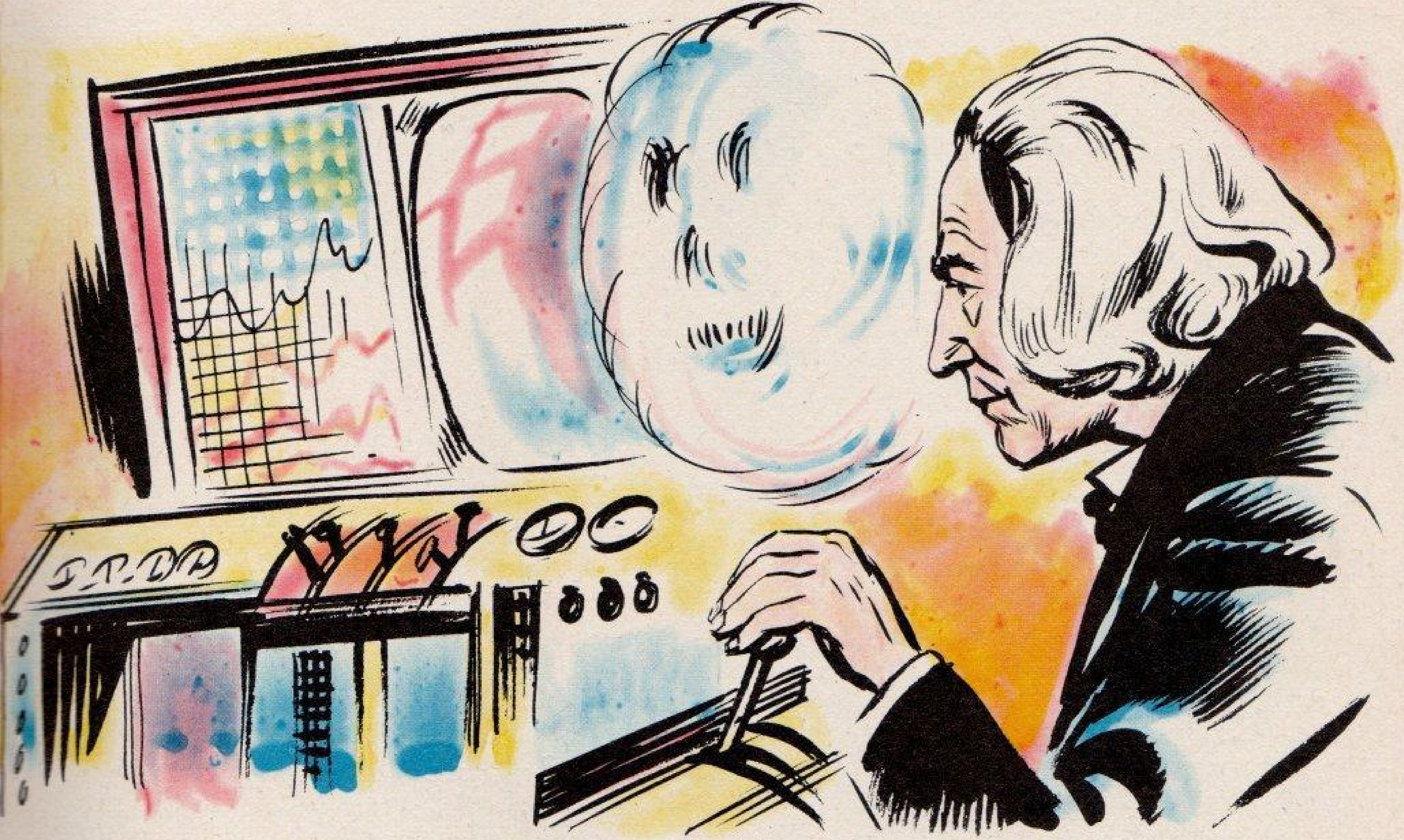
He bent over the work-bench again. His keen brain, refreshed and eager, checked over his previous work.

"Good! Very good!" he complimented himself aloud. "A few more slight adjustments. . . . So!"

The whine of the machinery rose to a piercing note. Valves glowed, beams winked, and once more the inside of the epitomiser was bathed in a dazzle of unnatural light.

Dr Who shielded his eyes from the glare, but he could see nothing. At last, when his eyes adjusted themselves to the fierce light, he started forward with a cry. "It works! Look! I've done it!"

Standing within the cubicle was a bright-robed human figure. He wore a deep scarlet robe, belted, but opening sharply away above and below. The top of the gown was cut back behind the arms, and at the back it rose into a stiff collar which stood up above the head.



Ten minutes later he straightened himself, brushing back his mane of hair with a self-satisfied gesture.

Turning briskly he addressed the silent watchers. "Well, my friends, all is prepared! Are you ready to take your places in the epitomiser?"

The Ethereals held a whispered conference. Then the one who had obviously been their spokesman before, now drifted towards the cubicle. The door closed behind the cloud-form, and Dr Who began to adjust the intricate controls. . . .

Dr Who switched off the controls. He watched with an appropriate sense of awe as the embodied Ethereal stepped from the epitomiser and stood looking towards his saviour.

Dr Who saw now that this man had features which set him apart from a truly human type. . . . The eyes were almost too far apart and too long. The chin was strong and smooth, the nose large, and the nostrils so high-arched that they almost resembled those of a horse.

The Ethereal leader came towards Dr Who. He bowed and caught the doctor's hand, pressing it to his lips.

"I—Mitzog—hereby relinquish my role as leader of the Ethereals. You are indeed our saviour—and now you shall be our ruler."

Dr Who pulled his hand away impatiently. "Oh, nonsense, my dear Mitzog! My reward is in seeing you successfully de-vaporised. . . .I presume this is the—er—form you possessed before?"

Mitzog glanced down proudly at his scarlet robe. "Yes. You have achieved complete success." He touched the other's shoulder with a gesture of respect. "How shall we call you—Master? Lord? Saviour?"

"Nonsense, my dear fellow. While I acknowledge your gratitude, and am grateful for it, I must insist on being treated simply as a doctor of science, a traveller who was able and glad to help you."

"Help?" The Ethereal raised his arms, as if in protest at the inadequacy of that word.

Dr Who waved a brisk hand towards the clouds. "We are wasting time. The sooner your companions enter the epitomiser and regain their original forms, the sooner we can do something about ending the robot rule."

So, one by one, the clouds entered the cubicle. Each time the miracle recurred; each time a brightly-clad Ethereal emerged. And each time, the fierce exhilaration of scientific success brought a smile to the lips of Dr Who.

At last his task was complete. The great hall was thronged with vibrant chattering figures, who bowed low with deep respect each time the Master Scientist looked towards them.

Dr Who turned towards them, rubbing his hands and smiling. "Very good! And now I fancy we might devise some plan to deal with the Baggolts."

"It will be a mission fraught with more dangers than you could ever imagine," warned Mitzog. "It is for us to face these dangers, not you. . . .You must wait here to see whether we succeed. And if we fail, you must be ready to flee from our planet in your Time and Space Machine."

Inwardly Dr Who chuckled. If only this Ethereal knew one half of the dangers he had faced during his travels in *Tardis*! Creatures far more potent and terrifying than mere robots had barred his path *and* threatened his life, often before.

He did not claim to be a particularly brave man, but he believed implicitly that Fate had a hand in directing the strange travels of his *Tardis*. So, whenever he was flung into a new sphere and new danger, he believed that he must see and experience, fight and conquer all that it had to offer.

"Ethereals—do you trust me?" he now asked in a loud voice.

"Yes!" Their cry of assent set the echoing vaults reverberating.

"Then will you let me help you vanquish the robots?"

"Yes!" Again they cried aloud, holding up both arms in approval.

Mitzog's face softened. "You are indeed a great leader," he said. "We will do whatever you say."

"Oh, nonsense, dear fellow!" cried Dr Who. "This is *your* planet. You know the lie of the land, and the strength of your enemy. Any plan of attack must be yours! But perhaps I can help in carrying it out."

The Ethereal leader motioned the other to follow him. He led the way into a small chamber hidden away behind one of the hall's vast pillars. He touched a button and a section of the wall slid back to reveal a large sight-screen.

"You shall see our capital—the great crystal city of Droog," said Mitzog, motioning Dr Who to a chair.

The screen came to life. They were looking at the sparkling ramparts of a great walled city. Two arched gateways gave entrance to it, and each was guarded by robot sentinels.

The picture faded and was replaced by one which showed the inside of the city. It was breathtaking. The roads were flanked by smooth green parklands. There were stands of trees here and there, and these trees were plainly tropical: coconut palms and palmettos, tree-ferns and flowering cacti. The buildings, which towered high, perhaps fourteen storeys or more, were shaped like inverted dunce-caps.

The only building which differed in shape was plainly not of crystal. Like a grim intruder in that place of beauty, it rose like a vast steel box in the centre of the city. And instead of the jewel-like groups of pleasantly asymmetrical windows of the other buildings, it peered around distrustfully through the slitted eyes of narrow peepholes in the dull steel walls.

"That is the brain-centre of the Baggolts," said Mitzog. "It is built with immense cunning. Radar reaches down to within a molecule smoothness of its surface, and other radar throws patterns back and forth. In this way Nalog, the Chief of the Robots, is able to remain with safety, keeping the controls of his master-panel set to 'Rebellion'. . . . You see how impossible our task is, Doctor?"

Mitzog snapped off the screen, and rose to his feet.

But Dr Who remained seated, staring in front, his brow furrowed with intense thought. Suddenly he looked up. "Have you considered entering the city, and the fortress, disguised as robots?"

A startled look came over the other's face. "You mean—you think that if we made steel costumes——?"

Dr Who jumped to his feet. "Of course! You can make robot suits within a few hours with the equipment you have here. That way we can enter the gates—and approach the fortress."

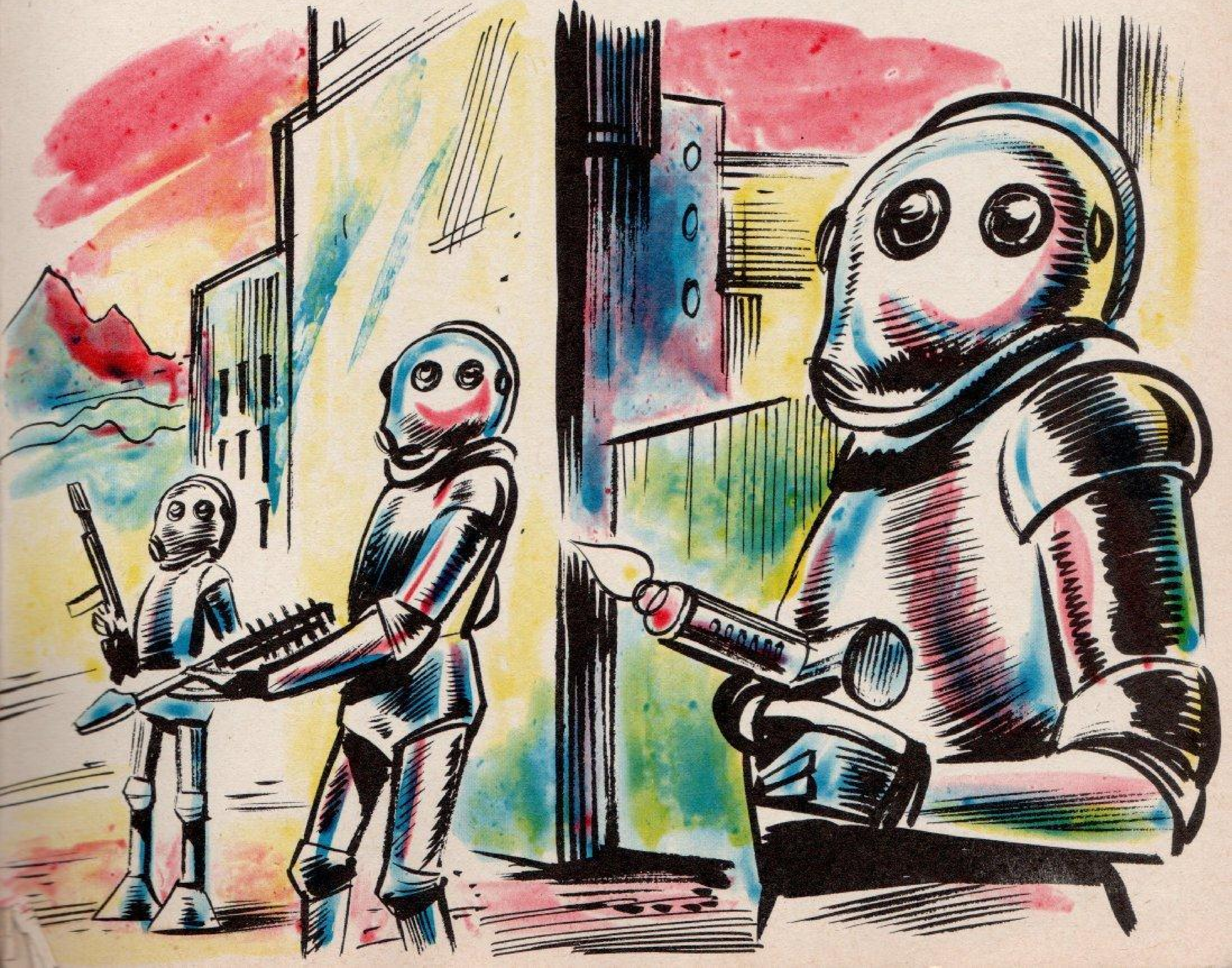
"And then?" asked Mitzog, frowning.

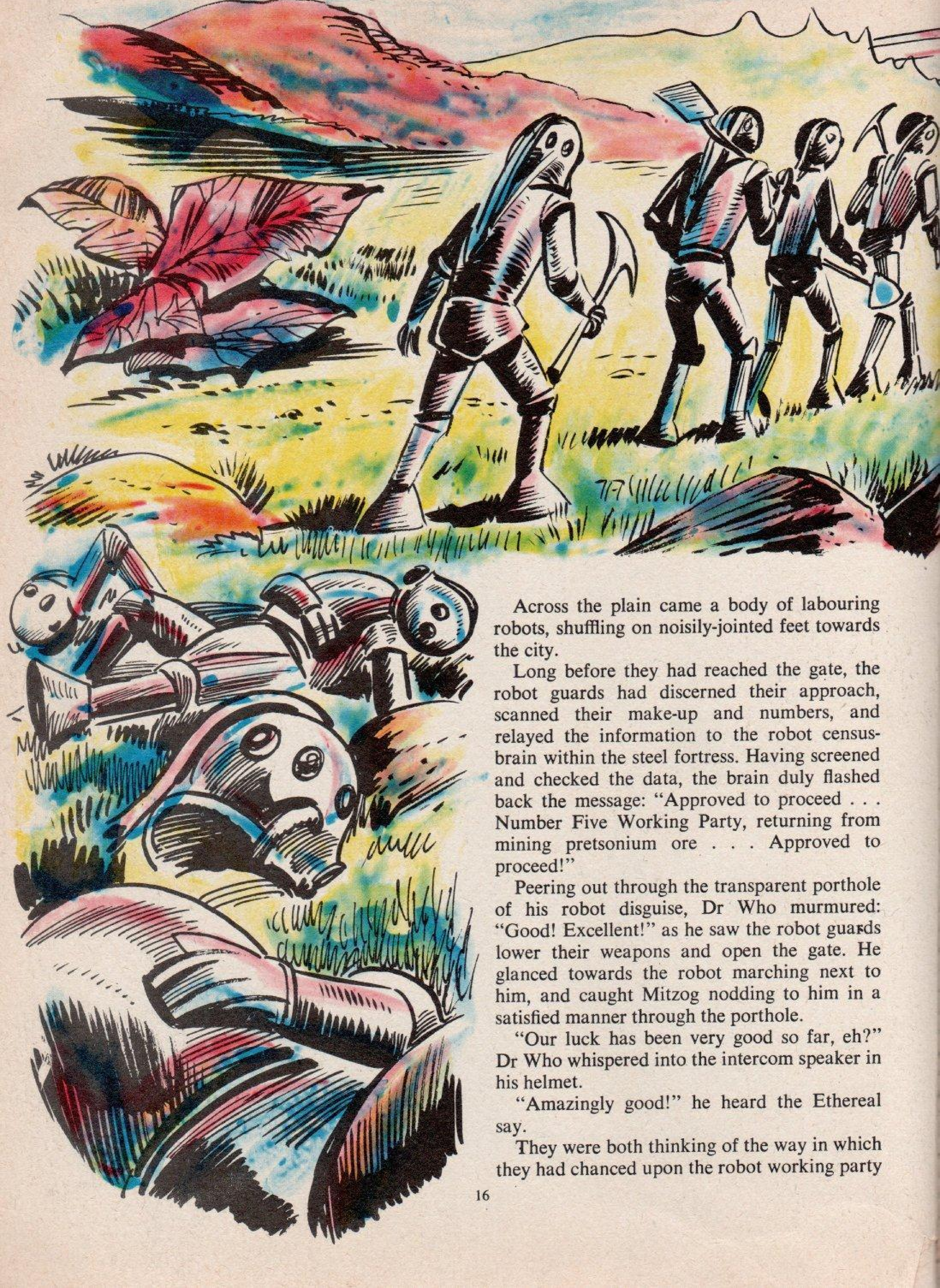
Dr Who smiled. "All in good time! But don't worry! I have a little plan in mind," he said. "Shall we start to make our disguises?"

* * *

The robot guards on the South Gate of the Crystal City were menacing masses of machinery. Mounted on bell-shaped feet converted into air-cushions for rapid pursuit, they stood higher than the gate itself. Multi-armed, they were bristling with lethal-looking weapons, from heat guns to vaporising units. Their heads were globes of metal, ringed with what looked like portholes.

Ceaselessly their heads turned on their broad metal shoulders, as their radar eyes scanned every approach.





Across the plain came a body of labouring robots, shuffling on noisily-jointed feet towards the city.

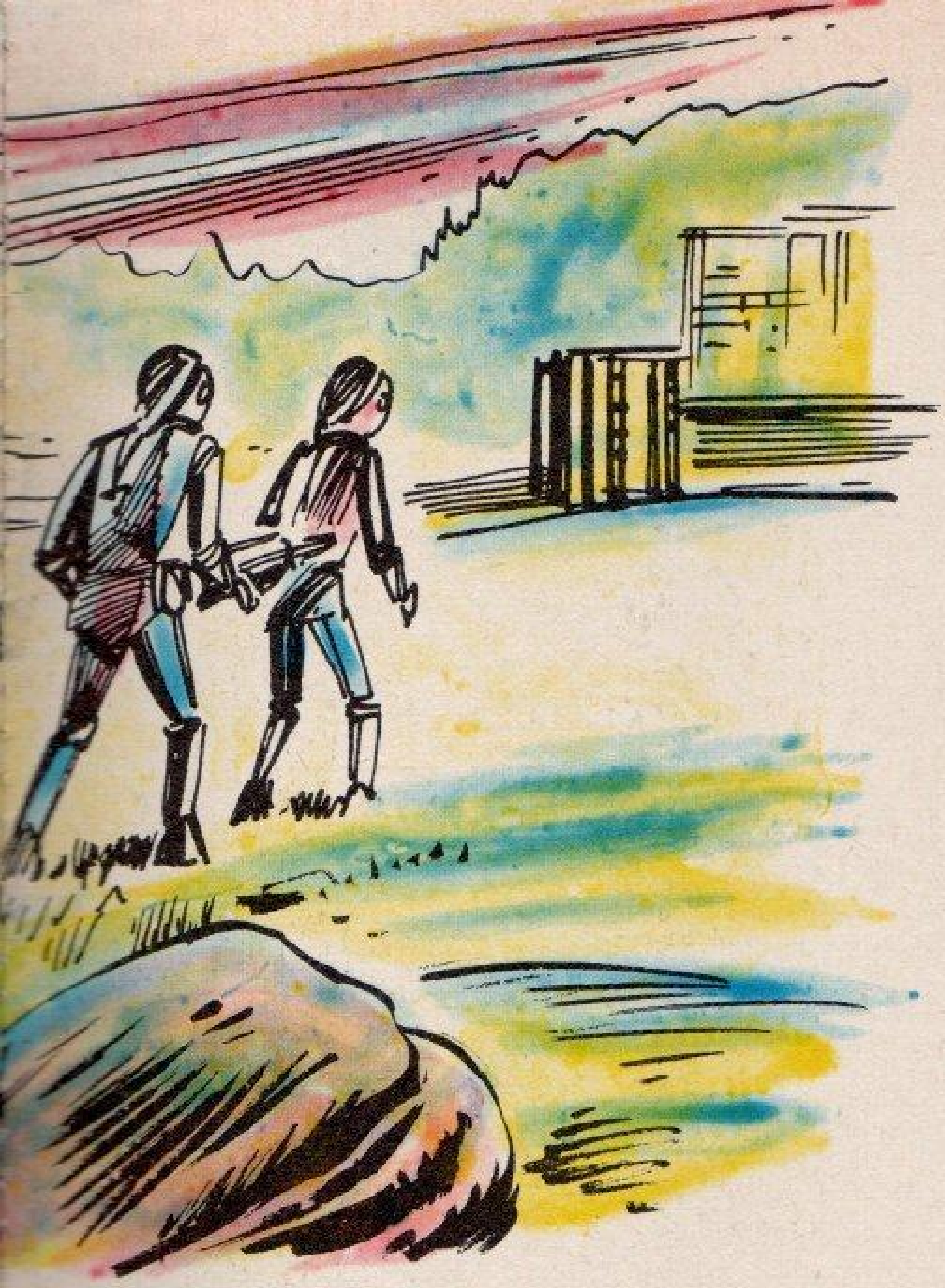
Long before they had reached the gate, the robot guards had discerned their approach, scanned their make-up and numbers, and relayed the information to the robot census-brain within the steel fortress. Having screened and checked the data, the brain duly flashed back the message: "Approved to proceed . . . Number Five Working Party, returning from mining pretsonium ore . . . Approved to proceed!"

Peering out through the transparent porthole of his robot disguise, Dr Who murmured: "Good! Excellent!" as he saw the robot guards lower their weapons and open the gate. He glanced towards the robot marching next to him, and caught Mitzog nodding to him in a satisfied manner through the porthole.

"Our luck has been very good so far, eh?" Dr Who whispered into the intercom speaker in his helmet.

"Amazingly good!" he heard the Ethereal say.

They were both thinking of the way in which they had chanced upon the robot working party



mining a rock face. A surprise attack by the eager Ethereals had left the robots heaped in a pile of junk metal on the ground. Then, carrying the mining tools, they had continued to the Crystal City, trusting to be mistaken for the mining party.

They filed past the guards and entered the city. Mitzog led the way. As they clanged along the main thoroughfare the robot inhabitants paid them scant attention. One or two, obviously police, turned their antennae in the workers' direction, but paid no further notice.

"They will expect us to go to the barracks," murmured Mitzog over the intercom.

"How long will it be before they discover we have *not* gone there?" asked Dr Who.

"They will know within the space of a toplas —or less!" was the reply.

Dr Who smiled wryly to himself. What was a toplas, he wondered! But this was no time to start learning the units of time used by the Ethereals. It was obvious that Mitzog meant they had very little time to carry out their attack on the steel fortress.

The dull sheen of the fortress walls was already to be seen among the buildings close by.

Mitzog gave the sign to Dr Who that meant the Ethereals were about to split up and surround the stronghold.

Moving as fast as he could within the clumsy confines of the metal shell, Dr Who followed down a tree-lined side road. He was panting with excitement. They came to a halt within a few paces of the fortress.

"Ready, Doctor?" came the voice of Mitzog. "The others must be in position now."

Dr Who opened a panel in the lower part of his suit. He reached through it and lowered a piece of equipment to the ground. It was an egolectascope, a device of his own invention. He switched it on and shielded his eyes against the dazzle of brilliant blue flashes which exploded from the two ring-aerials. The electro-magnetic field which it generated would be linked by similar devices carried by the other Ethereals. In this way the invisible alarm systems that ringed the fortress would be neutralised.

"Carry on!" he urged his companion, who stood ready with a long, black, jointed pole in his hands.

Mitzog lumbered forward. The blue flashes from the egolectascope reached hungrily for his metal legs, and for a moment he was enveloped in a halo of menacing sparks. Then he was through the electro-magnetic field and holding out the long pole towards the wall. It was a vibro-beam weapon, and it sliced through the metal like a knife through butter.

As Mitzog worked, an alarm siren began to shriek somewhere in the city. Dr Who glanced round. Robot police were speeding towards them on air-cushion feet. Before they could reach Dr Who and Mitzog, however, the rest of the Ethereals went into action. Ray guns stuttering and spitting flame, they brought the attackers to a sudden halt. Dr Who saw two of the police robots explode. Their metal plates were flung over the tops of the trees.

"I'm through!" cried Mitzog, and Dr Who swung round to see his companion clambering through a gaping hole in the fortress. He scrambled after him.

A mass of equipment lined the circular walls. In the centre of the building a moving walkway led to the upper floor.

Mitzog pointed and went towards it. But Dr Who grasped his arm and wrenched him away.

"No!" he shouted inside his helmet. "That's too easy! Wait!"

He fumbled for the clips that held the robot suit together. It fell from about him with a crash. He stepped out, dragged the disjointed mass of metal towards the walkway, and thrust it on to the moving surface.

They watched as it was borne upwards. As it touched the platform above there was a blinding flash.

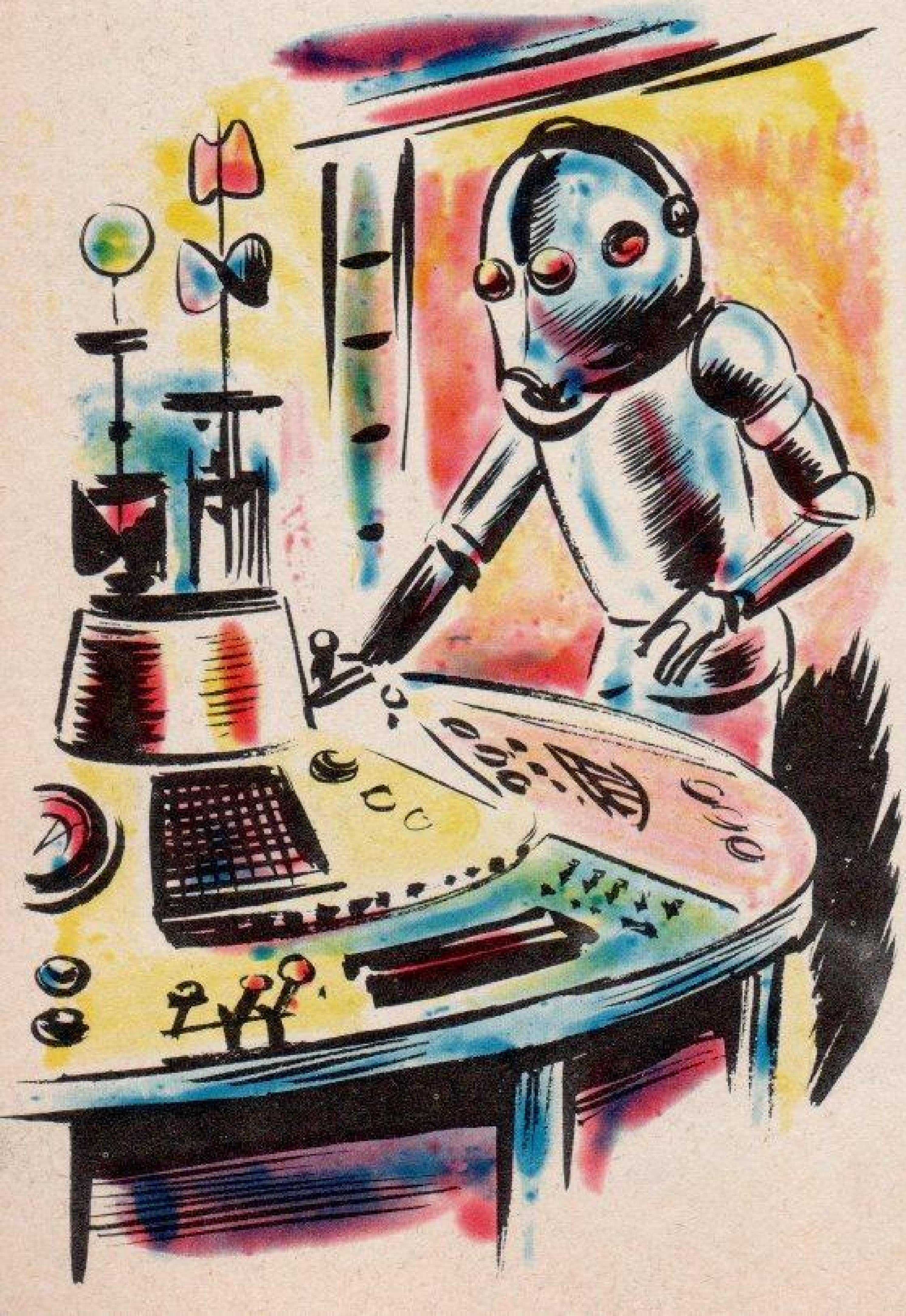
Mitzog shed his suit and stepped to Dr Who's side. "Thank you," he said. "If I had gone up there——"

Dr Who was too busy to listen. From an inner pocket of his frock-coat, he produced two packages.

"Get into this rubber suit—quickly!" he urged, handing one package to Mitzog.

The suits covered them from head to toe. Clumsily they shuffled on to the walkway. It bore them aloft, and they emerged on to the platform without harm.

Through an opening ahead of them lay the control room of the Baggolts. It was lit by the light of glowing valves and winking bulbs on a huge circular control table in the centre of the room. They could see a robot bending over the controls.



Mitzog raised a warning hand, motioning his companion to be silent. Then quietly he crept towards the unsuspecting Chief of the Robots.

A leap carried him across the last yard and he landed on Nalog's back with a crash. As the robot staggered away from the control board he clawed behind him to try and reach his attacker.

Dr Who acted at once. He ran to the control board.

"The master panel! Where is it?" he muttered, searching frantically.

Behind him he could hear gasps, and sickening thuds. Mitzog was holding on grimly to the robot, hacking at its plates in an effort to reach the wiring inside. And Nalog, finding himself unable to reach his attacker, had resorted to crashing against the walls.

A button caught Dr Who's eye. He pressed it. There was a whirring as, from an inner recess, a glowing panel rose.

"The master panel!" gasped Dr Who.

There was another crash, and a cry of pain from Mitzog. "Hurry! I can't hold on!" he cried.

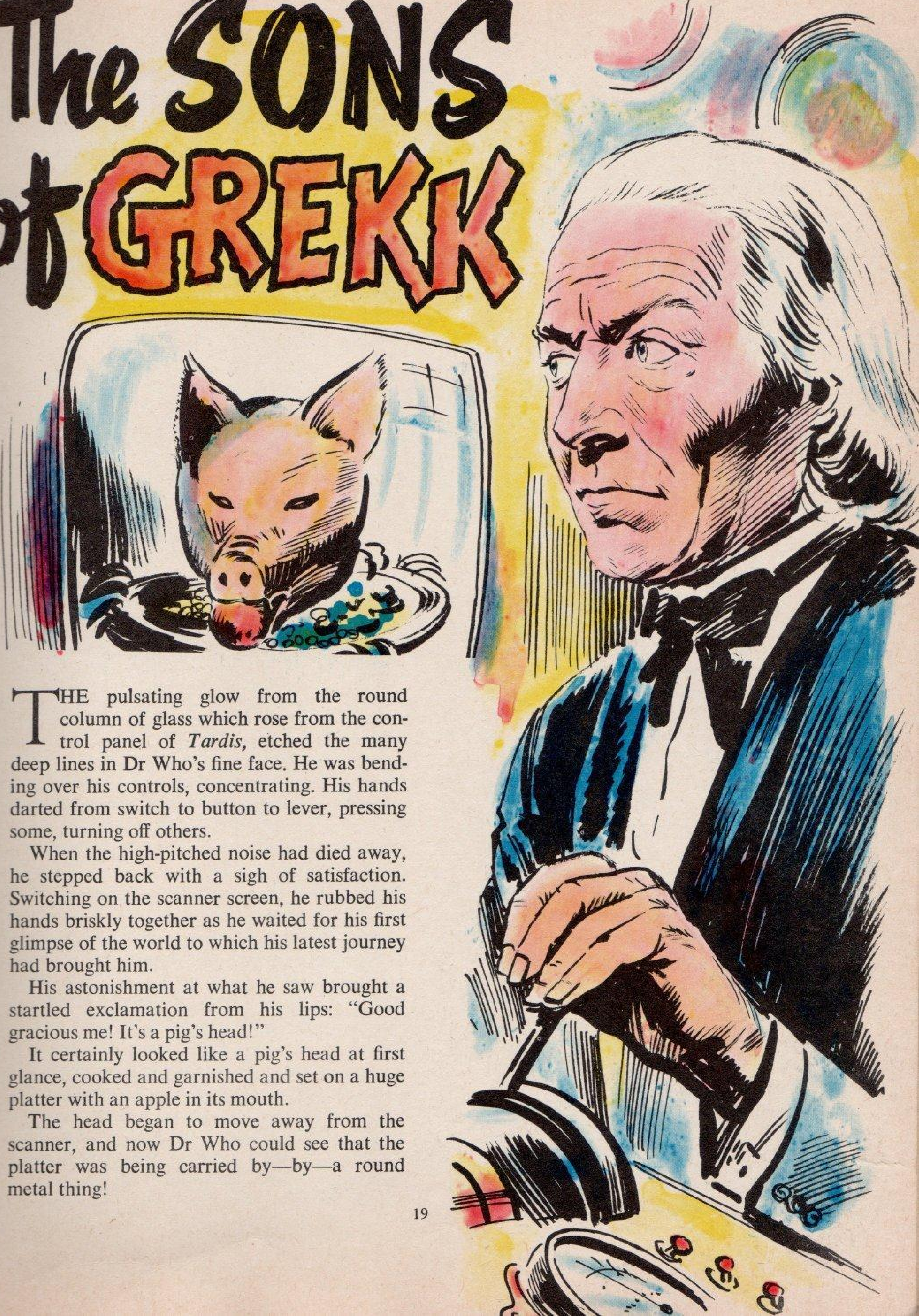
There was a single switch on the master panel. It was set to 'Rebellion'. Dr Who wrenched it violently in the opposite direction. Now it was pointing to 'Peace'.

He whirled to help Mitzog. But there was now no need. The intrepid Ethereal, injured though he was, had at last penetrated Nalog's steel plates. Thrusting his hand into the robot's breast, he wrenched at the wires which came loose with a dreadful hissing of short-circuits. An acrid cloud rose as the robot crashed to the floor.

Mitzog sank exhausted. Dr Who hurried to help him. "My dear fellow, you are a hero! The way you tackled that monster was the bravest thing I ever saw!"

The Ethereal looked up with a tired smile. "No, Doctor. The glory of this day is yours!" he said. "It was you who saved our planet from the Baggolts. And though you will soon leave us to continue your travels, the name of Dr Who will be enshrined for ever in the Annals of the Ethereals."

The SONS of GREKK



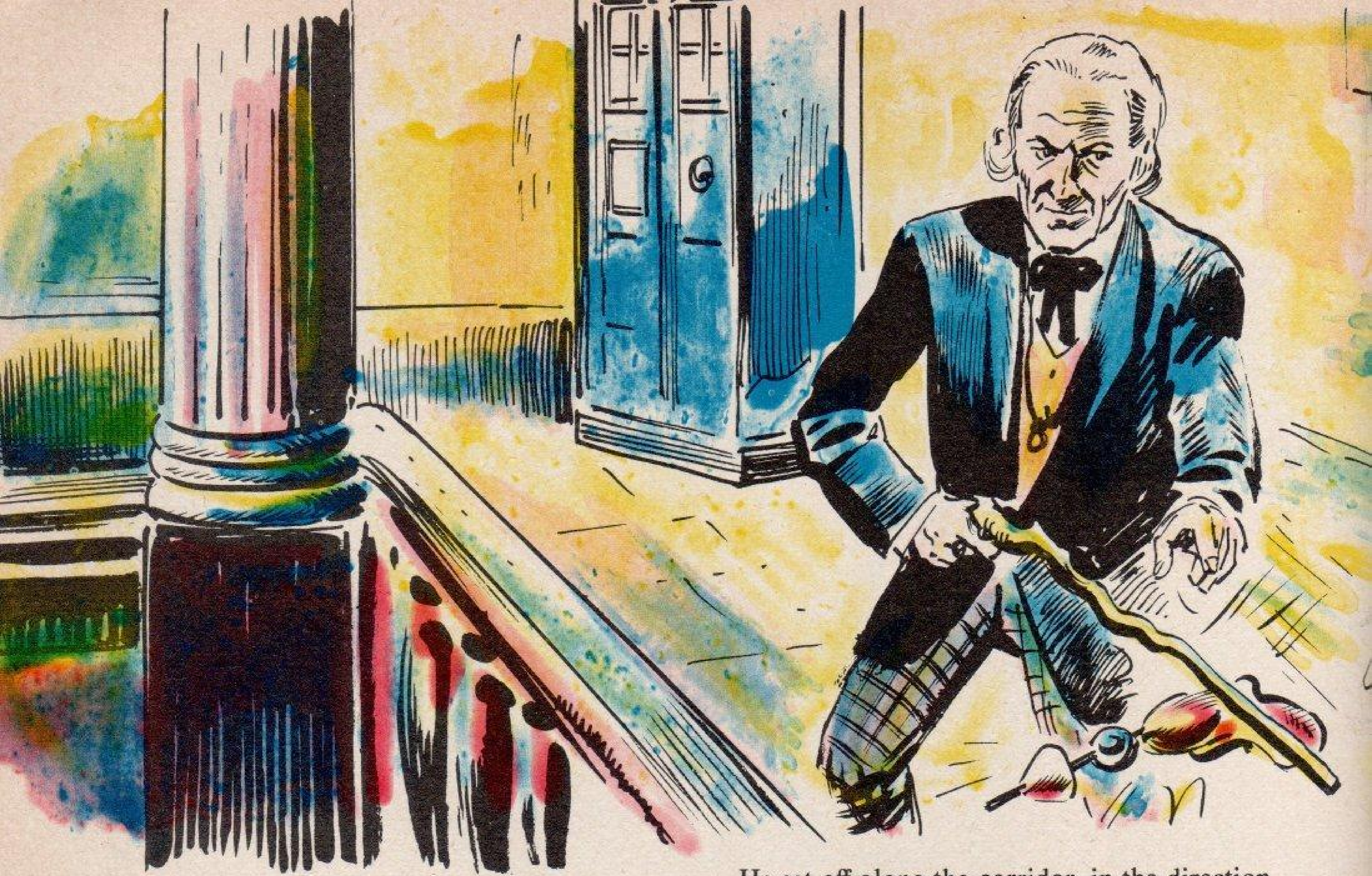
THE pulsating glow from the round column of glass which rose from the control panel of *Tardis,* etched the many deep lines in Dr Who's fine face. He was bending over his controls, concentrating. His hands darted from switch to button to lever, pressing some, turning off others.

When the high-pitched noise had died away, he stepped back with a sigh of satisfaction. Switching on the scanner screen, he rubbed his hands briskly together as he waited for his first glimpse of the world to which his latest journey had brought him.

His astonishment at what he saw brought a startled exclamation from his lips: "Good gracious me! It's a pig's head!"

It certainly looked like a pig's head at first glance, cooked and garnished and set on a huge platter with an apple in its mouth.

The head began to move away from the scanner, and now Dr Who could see that the platter was being carried by—by—a round metal thing!



It was squat and black. It had wheels and several arms. There were portholes in it and, from within, lights flashed on and off. In its other arms the Thing, the monster, the creature—if it was a creature—was carrying several other dishes that would have fittingly graced the Round Table of King Arthur.

Dr Who realised that *Tardis* had materialised inside a building. He appeared to be looking into a vast corridor, the walls of which were hung with hieroglyphics which glowed from tapestries of metal-strip. A flickering torch was thrust into a holder on a nearby pillar.

Dr Who rubbed his chin and chuckled wryly. "Well, if it wasn't for that mechanical manservant I would be inclined to believe that I had arrived in some medieval castle on Earth!"

He checked the instruments which sampled atmospheric and other conditions outside *Tardis*. With a nod of satisfaction he pulled the lever which opened the doors.

As he stepped into the corridor the smell of cooking made him wrinkle his nose appreciatively.

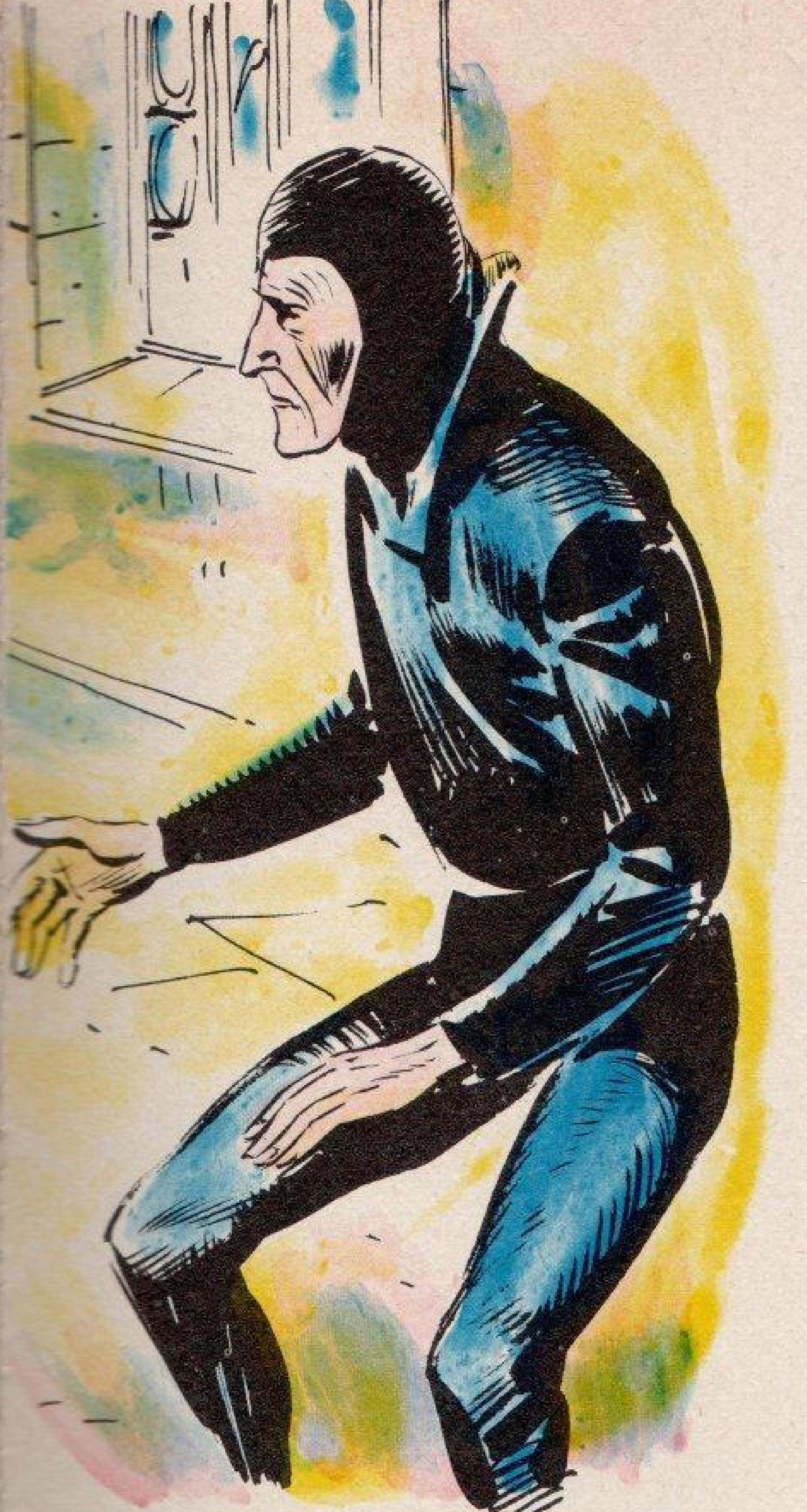
"Mm! I wonder if there is anyone here who would invite me to dinner? Those dishes smell as good as they look."

He set off along the corridor, in the direction taken by the metal manservant. He moved quietly, his eyes wary and watchful. It was quite possible, he knew, that the glowing hieroglyphics on the walls were some form of warning system, possibly watching his every move.

An opening between two pillars to his right made him hesitate. It led on to a small gallery—for all the world like a minstrels' gallery in a medieval castle. This gallery looked down into a vast banqueting hall, set with tables, and the clamour of voices and laughter told Dr Who that he had reached the recipients of the pig's head and other savoury dishes.

He was about to step on to the gallery for a closer look, when a movement made him pause. Then he saw that the gallery was not deserted, as he had presumed. A tall, thin figure, completely clothed in a close-fitting costume of black, crouched among the shadows in one corner of the gallery. The figure was staring intently down at the scene below. As one of the diners rose to speak, amid a thunder of shouts and table-thumping, the watcher drew out a weapon.

A chill of horror ran through Dr Who. . . . The figure in black was going to assassinate the speaker!



Dr Who acted swiftly. He stepped on to the gallery with a warning cry. "I say! I wouldn't try that, if I were you! Put it away!"

The assassin whirled. Black eyes glittered wildly from a long, pallid face. The weapon in his long, claw-like hands, swung towards the intruder.

Dr Who swung his cane and brought it down with a sharp rap on the other's hands. The weapon fell with a clatter and the black figure staggered back with a shriek of pain. The next moment he had brushed past Dr Who and vanished.

The men in the hall had risen up hastily from the banquet tables and were staring up at the gallery.

Dr Who gave them a reassuring wave.

They seemed fine, upstanding young men. Their garb was in keeping with the medieval atmosphere of the place, save that their tunics, hose and jerkins were made of a strange fabric which had a metallic sheen. Their weapons, too, were obviously electronic ray guns, and Dr Who saw that several were now pointing menacingly in his direction.

"My friends!" he called. "I am a traveller! I come on a peaceful mission!"

One of the men, broad-shouldered and blond-haired, motioned imperiously. "Do not move, stranger!"

There was a whirring sound behind him and Dr Who turned to find the mechanical man-servant filling the doorway with its squat bulk. One of its metallic arms snaked out towards Dr Who.

"Here, put me down!" he shouted as he felt himself plucked off his feet. The robot's grip was firm, but not harmful.

With another arm, the robot picked up the weapon dropped by the assassin. Then it moved swiftly along the corridor.

Dr Who realised that it was futile to struggle. He relaxed as they came to a halt on a strip of flooring which sank rapidly down to the level of the banquet hall.

There he felt himself set gently down on his feet. He dusted his jacket and turned to face the men.

"I find it very disagreeable being handled by this—this mechanical servant of yours," he said testily.

"What were you doing in the gallery?" thundered the blond-haired man.

Dr Who shrugged. "As a matter of fact, I happened to be there just in time to save one of you being assassinated," he said. "The intending assassin was a tall, thin creature dressed in black. He had some kind of ray gun. I believe your robot picked it up."

A red-haired young giant took the weapon from the robot. He examined it and scowled at the prisoner.

"I know these weapons! You are a spy sent by the Crustians!" he barked.

"I assure you I am not!" retorted Dr Who indignantly. "I have only just arrived on this planet."

The men exchanged amused glances, which expressed their open disbelief.

Dr Who rapped his cane angrily on the floor. "Perhaps you will listen to me a moment, before you take this attitude!" he exclaimed. "I am a traveller in Time and Space. That is how I come to be inside your—your castle, or whatever it is. My space-ship happens to have landed in your upper gallery."

There was such a ring of authority in Dr Who's voice, that the men stared at him in silence for a few moments, turning his words over in their minds. At length the blond-haired one snapped: "This mad story does not deceive the Sons of Grekk. . . . Come, brothers! We shall see for ourselves how the spy entered."

When they reached the spot where *Tardis* stood, a shout of laughter went up from the Sons of Grekk.

"Ho ho! This is what he calls a space-ship!"

"A splendid piece of equipment, brothers!"

"Behold! The space-ship of the time-traveller!"

Their raucous shouts rang through the vast passage.

The red-haired brother sprang forward and began to pound on the blue doors of the police-box, shouting: "Can you imagine this miserable object hurtling through Space? Ha ha!"

His blond-haired companion leapt forward and dragged him away. "You fool!" he snarled. "It may be some cunning device to blow us all up."

The company fell back in fear.

"Swarf is right!" cried one. "The Crustians would choose just such a trick to try and destroy the Sons of Grekk."

Swarf turned to the red-head. "You Morag, will take the spy to the Pit. The rest of you summon the Mechanislaves to stand guard over this wooden box-trap, until we decide how to get rid of it."

Morag jabbed his prisoner roughly with the muzzle of his ray gun. "March, spy!" he ordered.

Dr Who glowered. "There is no need to be quite so rough, young man!" he chided. He pointed towards *Tardis* with his stick. "Perhaps you would allow me to fetch one or two items of clothing from inside there?" he said.

Morag laughed, a dry humourless sound. "Oh yes, indeed! Allow you to go in there and blow us all to pieces? Do you take me for a fool? March!"

"Oh, very well!" said Dr Who.

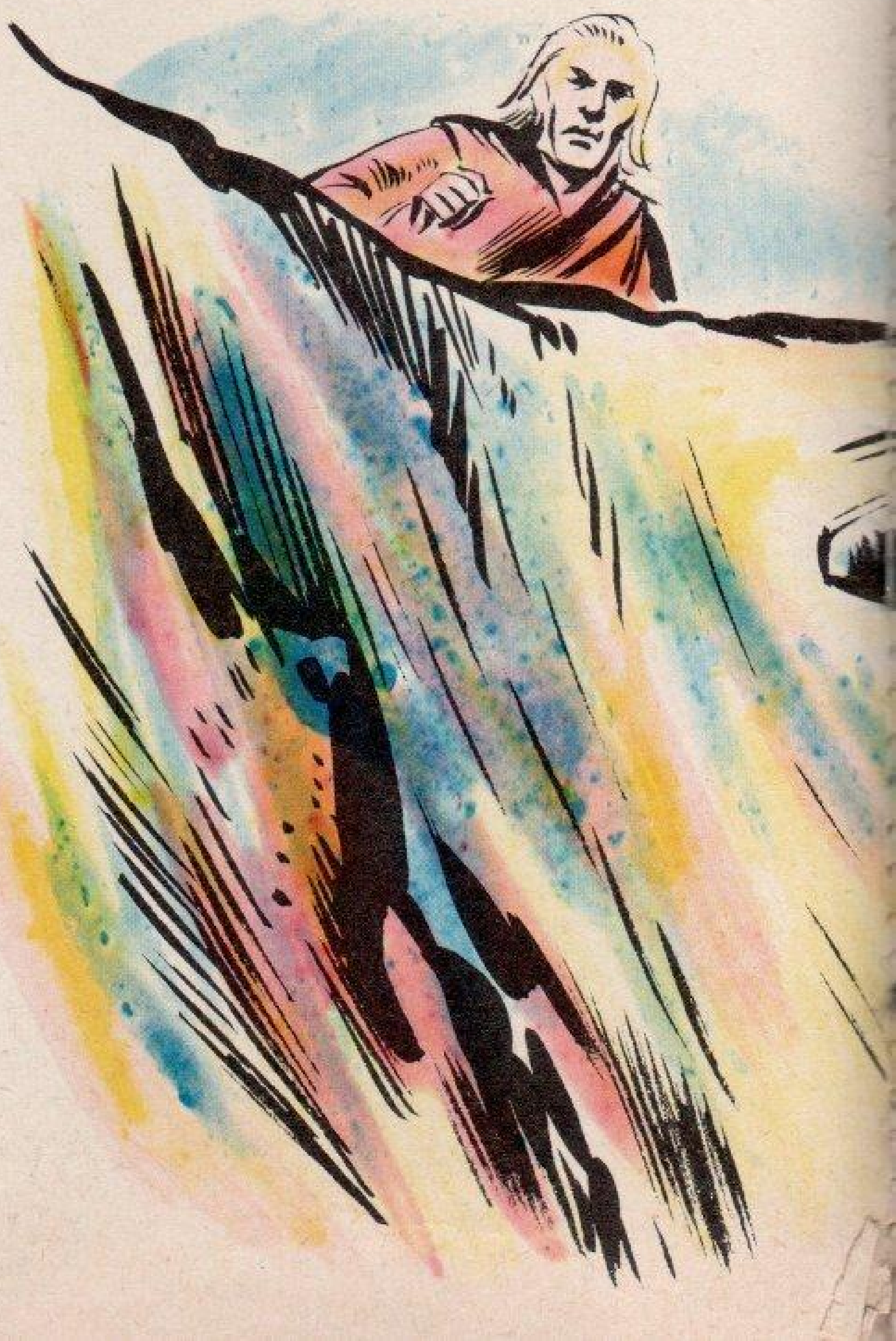
As he walked along the corridor, with Morag's weapon nudging him in the back, Dr Who saw several Mechanislaves speeding towards him, their several arms carrying weapons and what seemed to be electronic sounding devices. They passed him by with a swift rush of hot, oily air, their interior lights blinking rapidly from the portholes.

Dr Who walked on, thankful that he had locked the door of *Tardis* with his electronic key. Whatever the Sons of Grekk or their Mechanislaves tried to do to *Tardis*, they could not harm the marvellous craft.

Dr Who stopped as they came up against a blank wall. Morag stepped past him and taking from his cloak a large brooch with a glowing blue stone, he held it against one of the hieroglyphics in the metal-strip tapestry. The wall sank out of sight. A glistening metal cubicle lay behind it.

Morag motioned his prisoner to enter, then stepped after him. A transparent gate glided forward and clicked shut. The cubicle sank swiftly. . . .

When the downward plunge ended and the transparent gate opened, Morag pushed Dr Who out on to a rough-hewn platform, along the edges of which ran a guard rail.



Dr Who stepped to the guard rail. He gripped it tightly as excitement and wonder drove all other feelings from his brain.

"So this is the Pit!" he marvelled to himself. "It is amazing? Such creatures!"

He was gazing down into what appeared to be the huge crater of some extinct volcano. Oval in shape, it must have measured three miles from rim-to-rim. The walls, smooth and unscaleable plunged down a dizzying two hundred feet to the floor of the crater.

Here, it would seem, the Sons of Grekk cast their enemies to perish. Many of them were even now scuttling about in the Pit. None were of humanoid form, but Dr Who could see a variety of grotesque life-forms, with bulbous bodies and luminous wings which had been cruelly clipped. He also made out creatures which looked like turtles plodding laboriously along paths that ran between heaps of rock and earth that might have been primitive dwellings.

Dr Who noticed that every creature in the Pit seemed to be scuttling towards the same point, a little way to the right of where he was standing at the guard-rail.

He turned to meet Morag's mocking gaze.

"I gather that these—er—prisoners of yours are all examples of intelligent life forms to be found on this planet?" queried Dr Who.

The other gestured in contempt. "Vermin!" he snarled. "All vermin! We shall exterminate every one of them. We, the Sons of Grekk, will rule this planet."

Dr Who shook his head sadly. "That hardly seems the sensible attitude, my friend," he chided. "Is there not room for all on this planet?"

Morag's eyes blazed for a moment. "No!" he cried. "You know there is no room for vermin! You are a spy for the Crustians! You taunt me with these questions, eh?"

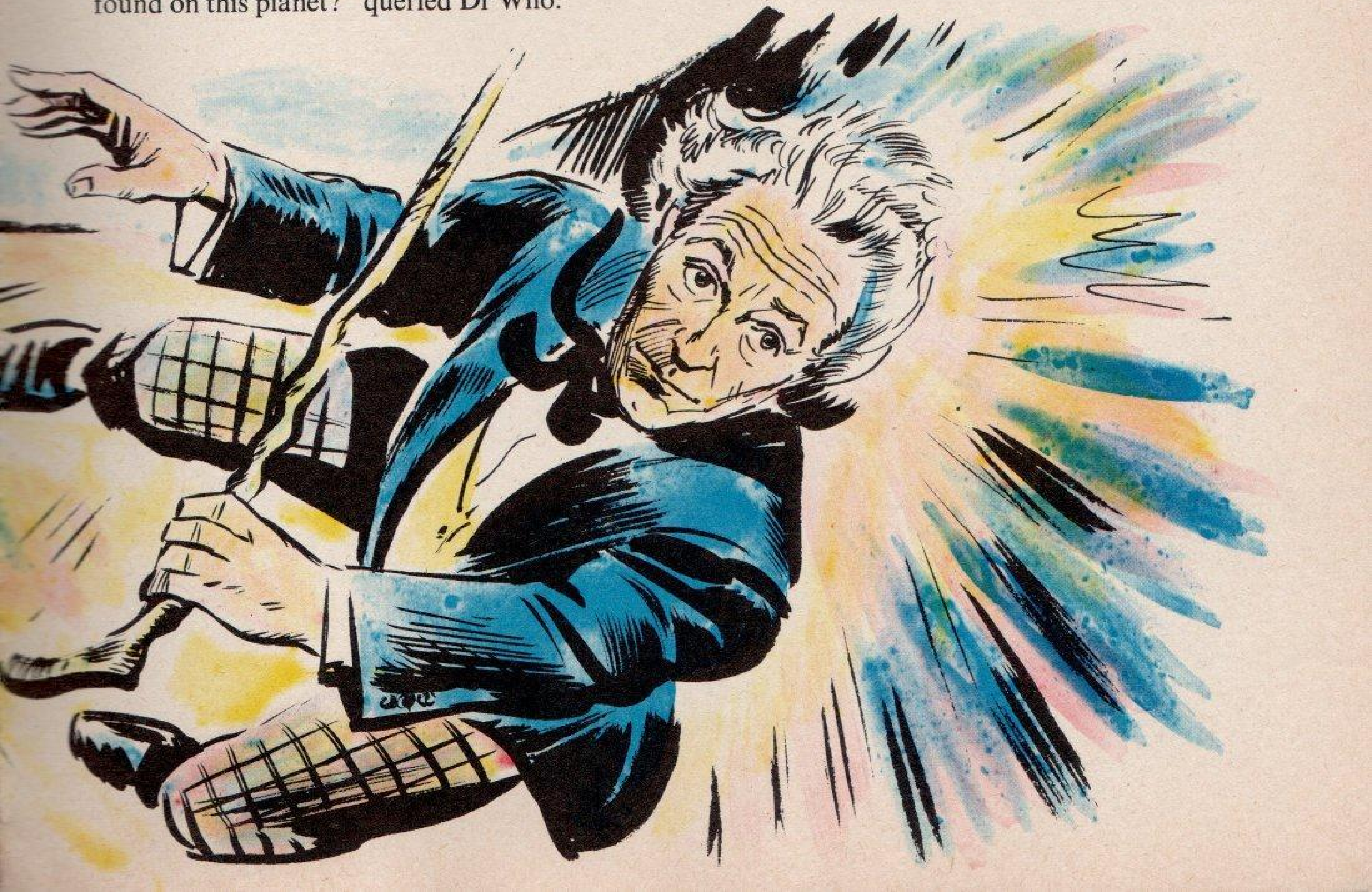
"Indeed I do not!" Dr Who assured him. "I told you before——"

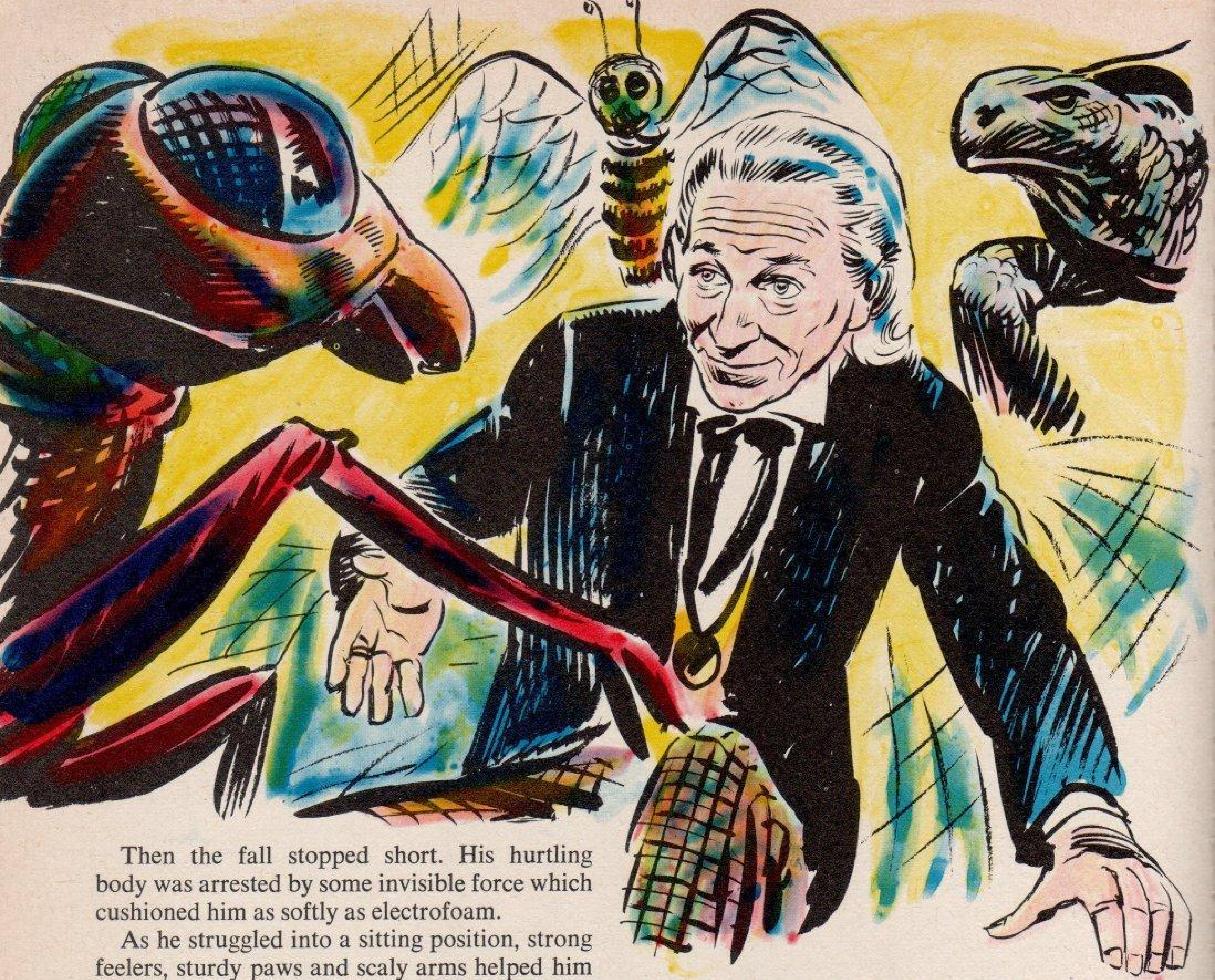
"Silence!" shrieked Morag. He pointed a trembling finger. "Get over there!"

Dr Who obeyed.

He found himself stepping on to a lip of rock jutting out over the Pit. When he realised that it had no guard-rail he made as if to turn back. But Morag's rough hands were already lunging. Dr Who staggered, lost his balance and fell over the edge. . . .

Down . . . down . . . down. He kept hold of his cane. He also kept his eyes open, and he saw the floor of the crater rushing upwards to meet him.





Then the fall stopped short. His hurtling body was arrested by some invisible force which cushioned him as softly as electrofoam.

As he struggled into a sitting position, strong feelers, sturdy paws and scaly arms helped him down to the ground. Even as he stood, gasping for breath, he saw that the creatures in the Pit had erected a web of glistening threads—spun, no doubt, by one of the spider-like prisoners.

Dr Who looked around with a grateful smile at a powerful-looking cockroach creature whose whole body was covered with a reddish-brown scale. The creature had approached the doctor to offer him one of its jointed legs to lean on. It now regarded him solemnly with its large shining black compound eye while close beside him hovered two butterfly creatures with clipped wings. They held their many-jointed antennae above his head, now and then brushing his mane of white hair with a feather-touch, as if to reassure themselves he had come to no harm by the fall.

"My friends," said Dr Who. "How can I thank you for saving me?"

One of the butterflies answered in a voice as gentle as the touch of its antennae. "You have the same shape as the Sons of Grekk, and yet you look different."

"His shell is different," said the Cockroach creature, rubbing a jointed leg over Dr Who's jacket.

Dr Who repressed a desire to smile. Instead he stroked his cheek and nodded. "Yes, my—er—shell is different. It is not of metal like the Sons of Grekk. I am, in fact, not of your planet. I am a traveller."

"A traveller?" The voice was deep and gravelly. Dr Who looked round. A huge creature with a heavy shell on its back was coming ponderously towards him. "How then did you come to fall into their hands?"

Dr Who leaned on his cane and told his rescuers what had happened since his *Tardis* materialised in the castle. When he described how he had prevented the black figure with the glittering eyes from assassinating one of the Sons, the assembled creatures began to nod.

"That is Deemon," clicked the cockroach. "He is the evil genius left here long ago by Grekk."

"But why?" asked Dr Who.

The turtle creature answered gruffly. "To make sure that his sons would never make peace with the other creatures on this planet."

"Ah, now I understand why the Sons of Grekk are so hostile and suspicious," said Dr Who. "They accused me of spying for the Crustians."

"Ha!" The turtle's heavy scaled jaws snapped together. "I am a Crustian. Never would we spy on the Sons of Grekk. Peace is all we have ever wanted. But Deemon would have killed one of them and thrown the blame on us."

Dr Who sank down on to a rock, and shook his head sadly. "Dear me! This is all so unnecessary!" he sighed. He looked around at the barren expanse of the Pit. "But how have you managed to survive after being thrown into this dreadful place?" he asked.

The Crustian leaned back so that his heavy shell rang hollowly against the wall of the crater. "Many did not survive," he intoned. "But I was the last to be thrown in and, unknown to them, I carried under my shell a portable sustenance unit, which has provided us all with enough food to survive."

Dr Who leaned forward, his eyes bright with interest. "How interesting!" he said. "May I see your machine?"

The Crustian rolled on to his scaly legs and moved heavily towards a mound of rocks. "Come! I will show you."

The mound had been cunningly built to disguise a compact room. On a slab of rock at one end stood the sustenance unit. It was a delicate tracery of wires, lit by winking bulbs set along the top of a grey metal box.

Dr Who bent over it. He examined it with expert eyes, and he felt excitement grow inside him. The unit was primitive compared with the equipment he had built into *Tardis,* but with a re-arrangement of coils it might be adapted to serve the plan which had sprung into his mind.

He turned to face his fellow prisoners, who were crowding around the entrance to the cave. "If you will allow me, my friends, I can turn this sustenance unit into a transmitter."

His words roused a murmur of clicking, whispering voices.

The Crustian shook his heavy head. "What good would a transmitter be to us?" he grunted.

Dr Who pointed upwards with his cane: "Could we not send a message to your fellow Crustians? Would they not come and rescue us from the Pit?"

Shrewd black eyes surveyed him from the scaly head. "They would come, yes. But they would find us all dead," said the Crustian slowly. "For the message would be intercepted by the Sons of Grekk. There is nothing more certain!"

A smile spread over Dr Who's face, and he began to nod with satisfaction. "Good!" he said. "I am glad to hear you say that. It was part of my plan, too. . . . Now suppose I start to work on the unit while you all listen to the details of my plan, eh?"

* * *

The Sons of Grekk had finished their feast in the banquet hall. They were slumped in their chairs around the table in a bloated condition.

Swarf, lounging at the head of the table, drank deeply from a goblet and slammed it down on the table. "The feast is over, brothers! Back to work! . . . We must decide how to get rid of the wooden box brought by the Crustian spy."

Morag leaned forward on his elbows. "Our instruments show no danger of explosion, so why not let the Mechanislaves take the box away and smash it up?" he demanded.

There was a murmur of agreement. Swarf was about to reply when a Mechanislave appeared from an opening in the wall and glided rapidly forward.

"Well?" growled Swarf.

A thin, electronic voice sang out from a speaker somewhere inside the robot: "The creatures in the Pit are sending a radio message to the Crustians, asking for help."

The men sprang to their feet, shouting with anger.

Swarf hammered on the table, and when he could be heard again he roared: "Did you not search the spy before you cast him in the Pit, Morag!"

There was no need for a reply. Morag's sullen face flushed, and he bit his lip.

"Fool!" shouted Swarf. "He must have had some kind of transmitter hidden in his clothing.

. . . Come, brothers! To the Pit! If the Crustians are coming, they will find nothing but carcasses down there!"

The Sons of Grekk roared in agreement. Drawing their ray guns, they rushed from the hall shouting: "To the Pit . . . Wipe them out!"

When they reached the Pit, the Sons gathered along the guard-rail. They howled threats down at their doomed prisoners, who were strung out in a long line directly below.

Dr Who stood in their midst. He leaned upon his cane with a slight smile on his face, and his coolness seemed to give confidence to his companions. They watched in silence as the men lowered ladders and began to descend into the Pit.

Because of the way in which the prisoners were lined-up, the Sons of Grekk were forced to string-out into a line facing them. Their deadly weapons were ready to spew death.

But their leader, Swarf, could not resist a cruel sneer. "So you thought to escape from the Pit, eh? Where is the transmitter you brought, Spy? Do you want to tell us before you die?"

Dr Who beckoned. "Certainly I will show you. It is right over here."

Swarf took a step forward. The others followed suit.

Dr Who raised his hand again, but this time he was holding his pocket handkerchief. At the signal, the Cockroach and the Crustian, standing at extreme ends of the line of creatures, suddenly gave a tremendous heave at ropes which they held in their hands. At once a net of the same glistening threads which had saved Dr Who when he plunged into the Pit was jerked upwards from the ground beneath the feet of the unsuspecting men. They were tossed into struggling heaps. Before they could recover, the Insects had darted forward to tie the ends and sides of the web.

The Sons were trapped as neatly as flies in the larder of a cunning spider.

Then there arose such a triumphant chorus of chirring, clicking and snapping noises, that the groans of the hapless Sons were completely drowned.

Dr Who was encircled by grateful Insects; his back was slapped by jointed legs and scaly feet, and his white hair caressed by antennae.

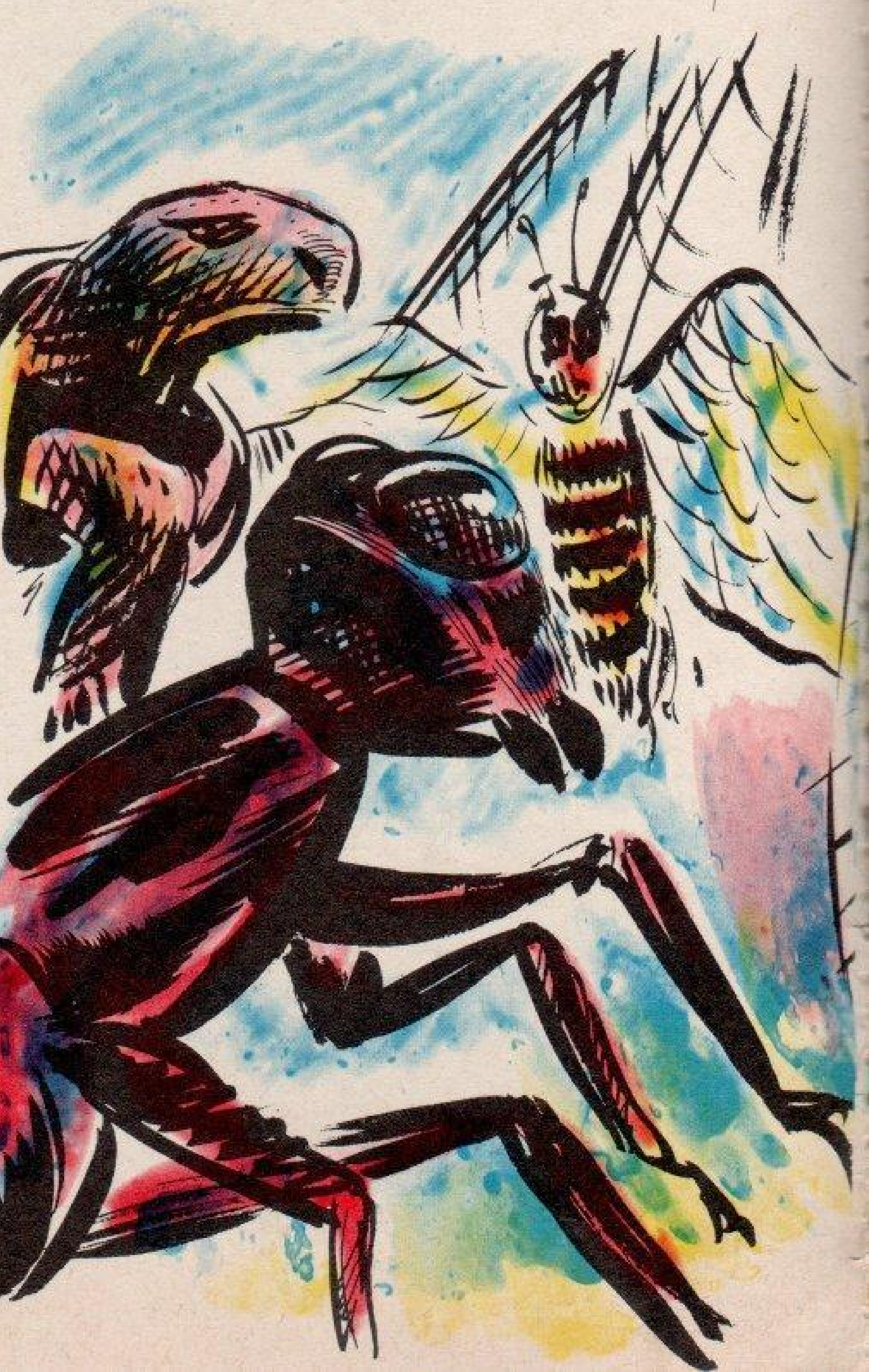
He endured this excess of gratitude, chuckling. "Well, well! My little plan worked quite well, didn't it, eh?" he said. "Now I think we had better collect all the weapons, and climb the ladders out of this awful place."

The Crustian poked at the writhing bundle in the web. "What about the glorious Sons of Grekk?" he asked.

Dr Who smiled. "I suggest we leave them here in the Pit for a while. A taste of their own medicine should be quite useful in making them change their mind about the need for peace on this planet."

When they reached the upper regions of the castle, Dr Who turned to his companions. "Some of you must go out to meet the Crustians who will be coming in answer to our call for help," he said. "The rest of us must seek out the control centre from which the Mechanislaves are worked. We must make sure they are not programmed to be hostile to strangers. . . . Come!"

A grim game of hide-and-seek began. As the Insects scurried through the vast rooms and passages of the Castle, they were forced to flee or hide whenever they encountered one of the squat black machines.



Dr Who found himself trapped in a corridor by two of the Mechanislaves, as they advanced on him from different directions. As he stood, hesitating, the two robots halted. He saw the lights flashing inside their portholes change to red, and he realised that they had homed-in on him with their radar 'feelers'.

Desperately he flung himself aside towards a pillar. As he did so, a finger of flame reached out from one of the Mechanislaves, searing the ground on which he had been standing the moment before.

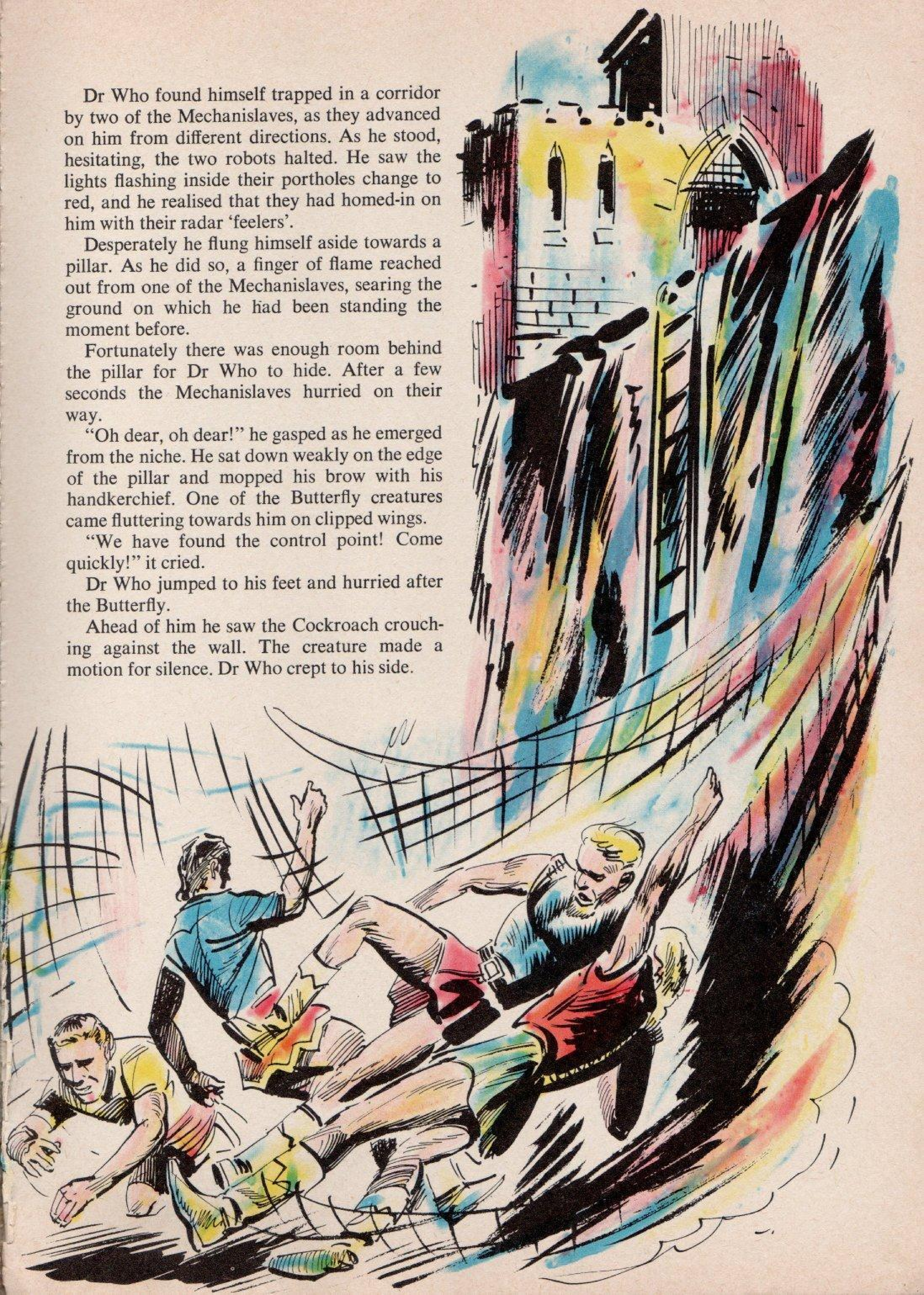
Fortunately there was enough room behind the pillar for Dr Who to hide. After a few seconds the Mechanislaves hurried on their way.

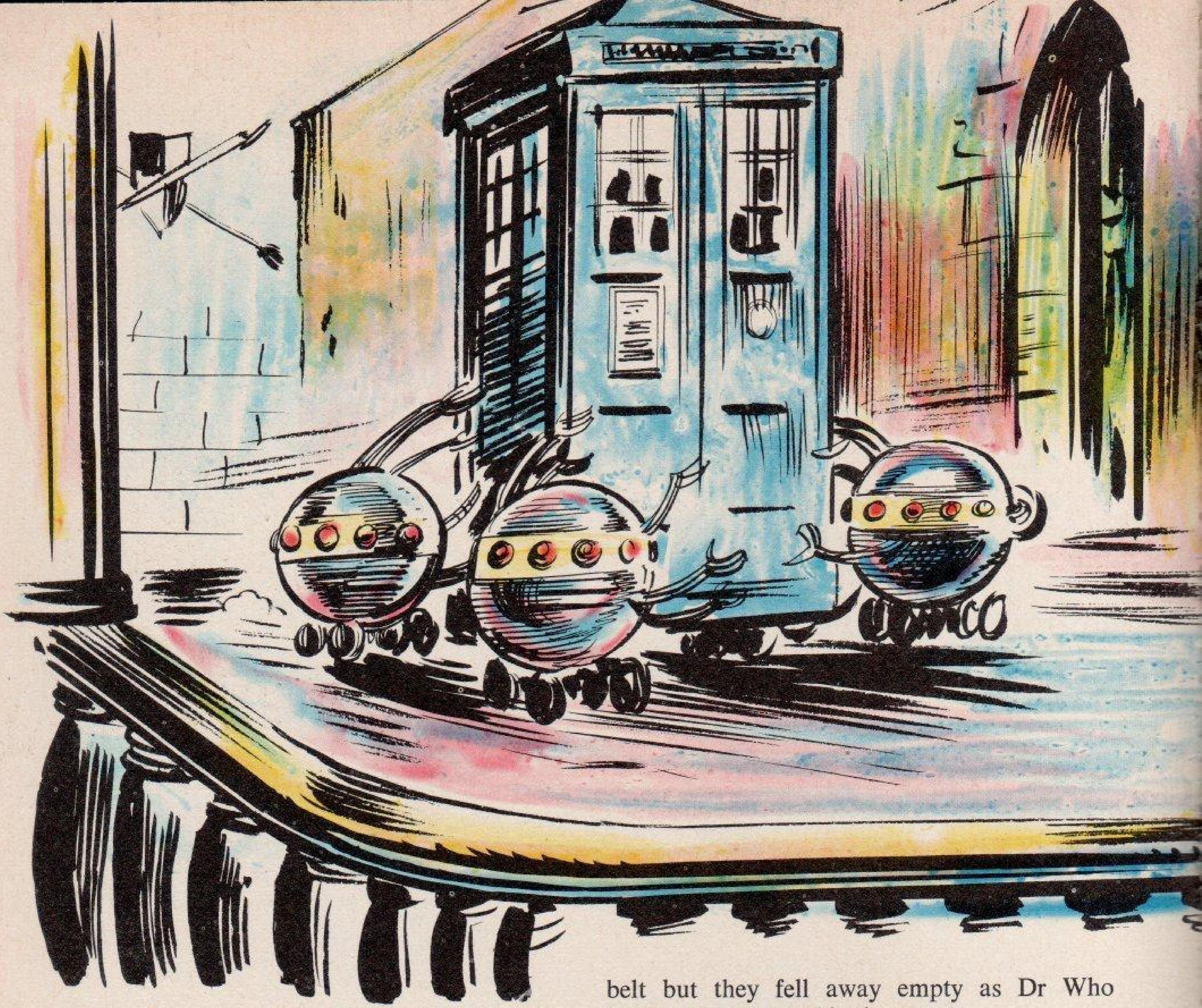
"Oh dear, oh dear!" he gasped as he emerged from the niche. He sat down weakly on the edge of the pillar and mopped his brow with his handkerchief. One of the Butterfly creatures came fluttering towards him on clipped wings.

"We have found the control point! Come quickly!" it cried.

Dr Who jumped to his feet and hurried after the Butterfly.

Ahead of him he saw the Cockroach crouching against the wall. The creature made a motion for silence. Dr Who crept to his side.





Extending one of its jointed legs, the Cockroach pulled aside the tapestry. Dr Who craned forward. He found himself looking into a room full of equipment. At a control-board stood a tall figure manipulating the dials. He was clothed completely in close-fitting costume of black. Dr Who caught a glimpse of his long, pallid face, and his fingers closed tightly around his cane. . . .

It was Deemon, the evil genius!

Dr Who drew a deep breath. So this was why the robots had tried to kill him. Still trying to stir up enmity, Deemon had taken advantage of the absence of the Sons of Grekk to turn the Mechanislaves into death-dealing monsters.

Quietly Dr Who stepped into the room. Raising his cane, he pressed the end of it into Deemon's back. "Do not try anything foolish!" he warned.

The other whirled, black eyes glittering. His claw-like hands reached for a weapon in his belt but they fell away empty as Dr Who levelled the cane at his chest.

"Throw down your gun!" ordered Dr Who.

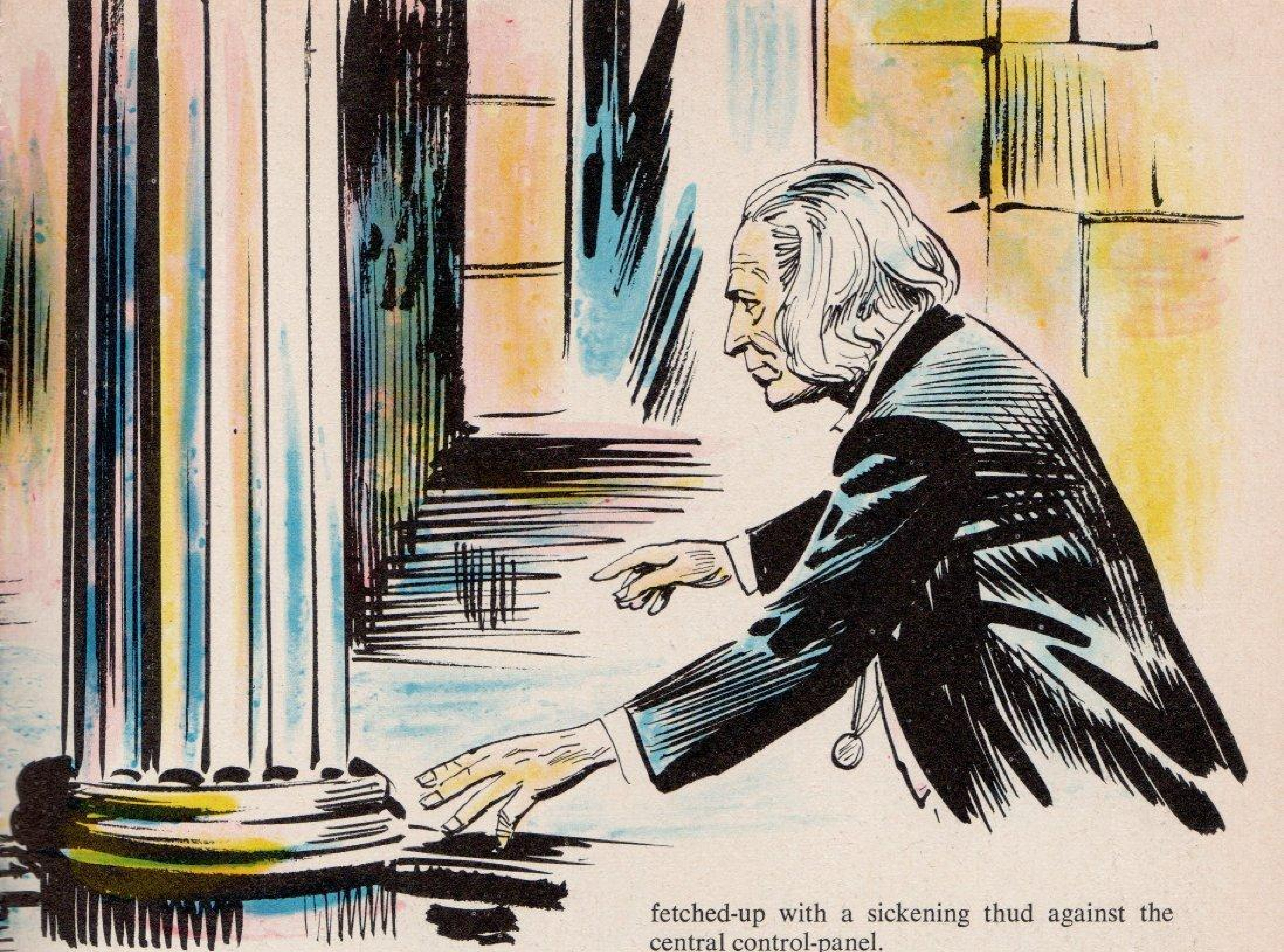
The weapon clattered on the floor. The Butterfly darted forward to pick it up.

Dr Who lowered his cane. He pointed towards the control panel. "The first thing for you to do, my dear Deemon, is undo the mischief you have just been doing!"

The other turned sullenly towards the dials. At that moment another Insect burst into the room, its antennae quivering with emotion. "Come quickly! The Mechanislaves are carrying away your space-ship!"

Dr Who leapt for the doorway. "Take care of Deemon!" he cried to the Cockroach.

The evil genius had already taken advantage of the interruption to leap for a window. But the Cockroach moved like lightning. With one leg through the window, Deemon was plucked back into the room by the strong jointed legs of the insect.



Dr Who ran along the passage. He tore up a flight of steps. Panting desperately, he paused at the top. Trundling down the passage towards him came four of the Mechanislaves. Between them they were carrying *Tardis*.

In a flash Dr Who saw what they were intending to do. A huge window occupied one whole section of a nearby wall. . . . The robots were going to push *Tardis* out of the window!

He raced madly towards them. With one hand he tore from around his neck the electronic key which opened the door of *Tardis*!

The monsters were almost upon him when he stopped. For a moment he crouched; then, with an astonishing leap, he managed to grasp the ledge at the bottom of the police-box. For a moment he swung there like a pendulum as the Mechanislaves trundled on towards the window. Then he hauled himself up. . . .

The key slid home. The door opened, and Dr Who tumbled into *Tardis*. Unable to stop himself, he slid across the polished floor, and fetched-up with a sickening thud against the central control-panel.

Dazedly he pulled himself upright. With frantic haste he set the controls. As he slammed home the last lever, the Mechanislaves thrust *Tardis* out of the castle window. . . .

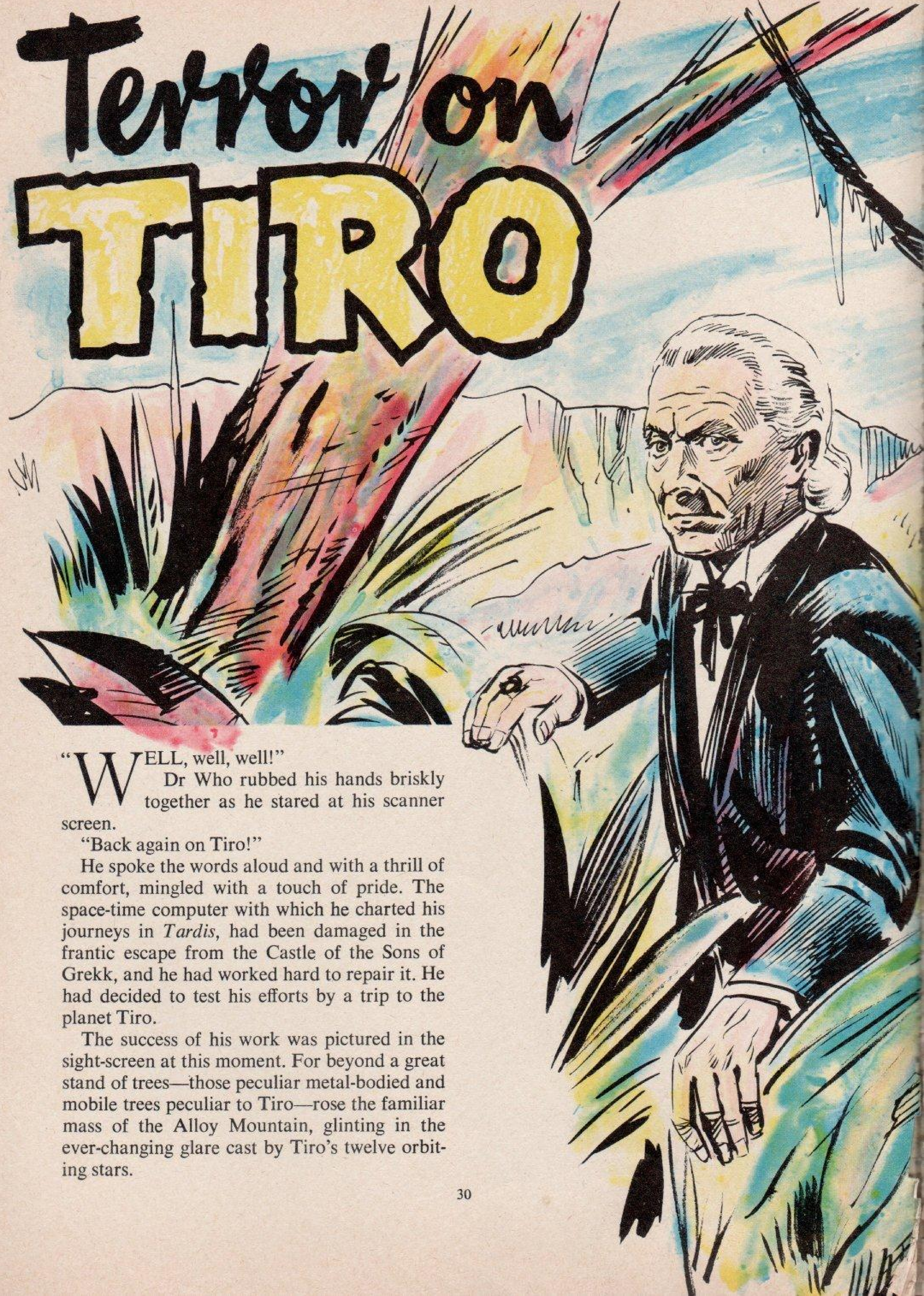
Dr Who hung on for life as his space-ship began to turn over and over in its downward plunge. He waited for the awful crash. . . .

But it never came. Like a merciful awakening from a dreadful nightmare, the gyrating ceased and *Tardis* returned to an even level. The blackness in his sight-screen faded to the grey of the intra-dimensional flux between the universes where there is no light, no darkness, no heat or life, just nothingness.

Sobbing with relief, he locked the controls and turned wearily towards a couch. As he sank on to it, he allowed himself a faint smile.

"A pity I had to leave my friends so suddenly," he murmured. "But on the other hand, with the Sons of Grekk all tied up in a neat bundle, and Deemon safe from doing any more mischief, I think the chances of peace for that planet are reasonably good!"

Terror on TIRO



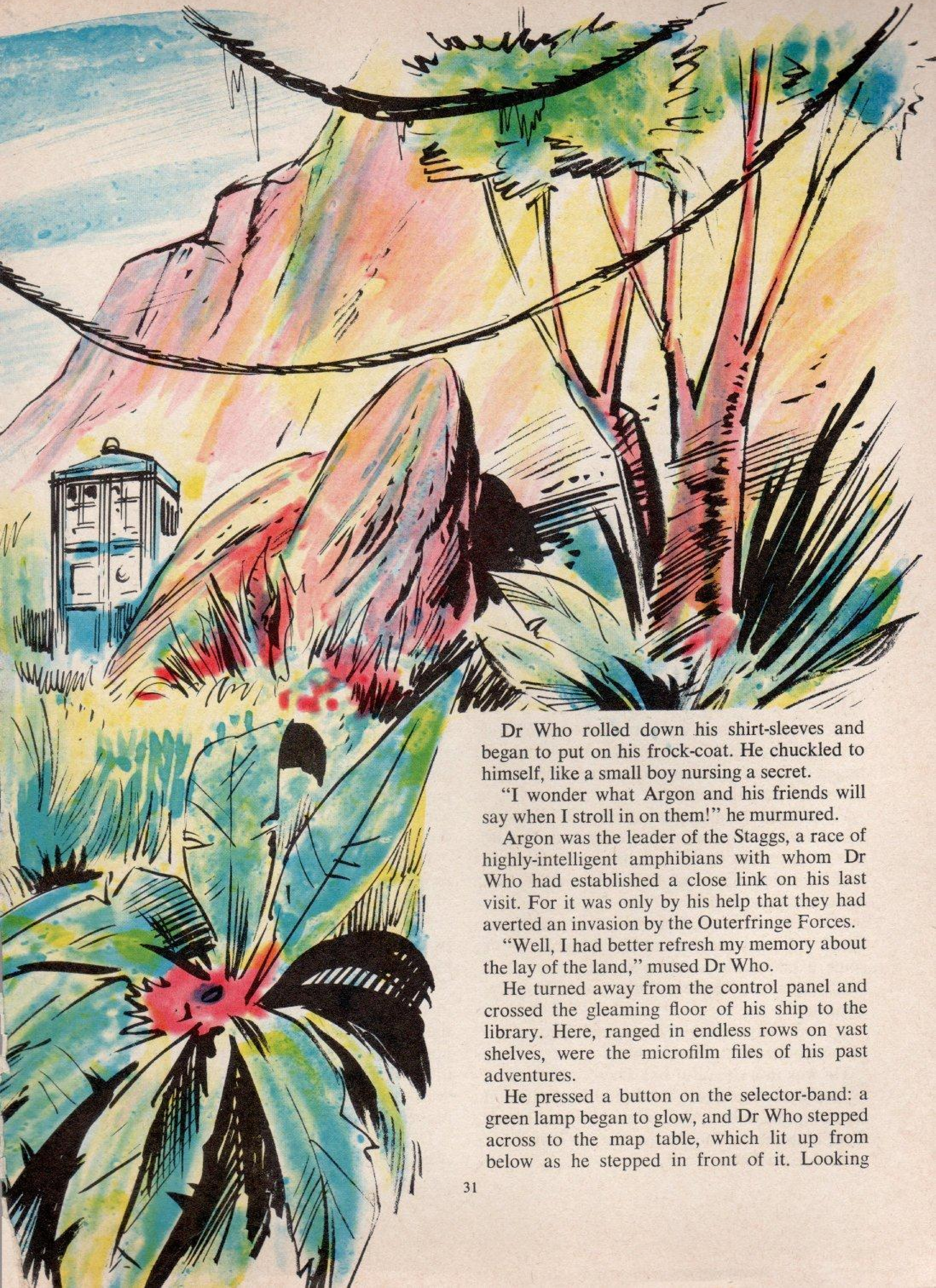
"WELL, well, well!"

Dr Who rubbed his hands briskly together as he stared at his scanner screen.

"Back again on Tiro!"

He spoke the words aloud and with a thrill of comfort, mingled with a touch of pride. The space-time computer with which he charted his journeys in *Tardis*, had been damaged in the frantic escape from the Castle of the Sons of Grekk, and he had worked hard to repair it. He had decided to test his efforts by a trip to the planet Tiro.

The success of his work was pictured in the sight-screen at this moment. For beyond a great stand of trees—those peculiar metal-bodied and mobile trees peculiar to Tiro—rose the familiar mass of the Alloy Mountain, glinting in the ever-changing glare cast by Tiro's twelve orbiting stars.



Dr Who rolled down his shirt-sleeves and began to put on his frock-coat. He chuckled to himself, like a small boy nursing a secret.

"I wonder what Argon and his friends will say when I stroll in on them!" he murmured.

Argon was the leader of the Staggs, a race of highly-intelligent amphibians with whom Dr Who had established a close link on his last visit. For it was only by his help that they had averted an invasion by the Outerfringe Forces.

"Well, I had better refresh my memory about the lay of the land," mused Dr Who.

He turned away from the control panel and crossed the gleaming floor of his ship to the library. Here, ranged in endless rows on vast shelves, were the microfilm files of his past adventures.

He pressed a button on the selector-band: a green lamp began to glow, and Dr Who stepped across to the map table, which lit up from below as he stepped in front of it. Looking down, he examined the map of Tiro which the Staggs had helped him to draw.

"Hm!"

Dr Who leaned both elbows on the map table and searched for the stand of trees showing on his scanner. When he found them, he murmured with vexation: "Oh dear! It appears that *Tardis* has materialised on the wrong side of the Alloy Mountain."

He straightened up, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "Hm! Well, here is another chance to see if the space-time computer is in perfect working order again," he said.

As he walked back to the control panel he continued: "I will set the space selector to move *Tardis* to the other side of the mountain, but keep the time-control tuned to the present."

He switched off the scanner-screen. His hands began to run over the dials and switches.

But this time *Tardis* did not respond. There was a faint shivering in the floor beneath his feet, and the lowering decibels of the engine whine faltered and changed to a complaining rumble.

Clicking his tongue with vexation, Dr Who stepped quickly to another instrument panel to check his fault locator. He stared down at the small glass panel and the numbers spinning around inside it.

"M Six!" he exclaimed. "One of the klister valves."

He stepped to another part of the board and opened a protective covering. He ran a slender finger over the glistening valves until he came across the damaged one.

As he held the glass-walled valve in his hand, a sudden chill of fear swept over him. For he saw at once that the trouble lay in the need to replenish the supply of liquid Magnatite that acted as a conductor.

"Oh, what an idiot I am!" he exclaimed aloud. "I used the last of the Magnatite for some experiments about a month ago. . . . I really meant to replenish the stock at once. Dear me!"

His mild expression of dismay bore no resemblance to the turmoil inside him.

He was in a dreadful fix! There was nothing he could use to replace the liquid Magnatite in repairing the valve. And unless he could repair it he might be destined to live out the remainder of his life on Tiro.

Suddenly relief flowed through his whole body, like a warming drink.

"But of course!" he exclaimed. "Argon will be able to help me! I must find him without any delay."

He set about his preparations briskly. He knew well that Tiro was not a very hospitable planet, and there would be many dangers to face in crossing the unknown forest to be seen on his scanner-screen.

One of his pocket's now bulged with concentrated food tablets. He placed the precious klister valve in an inside pocket, picked up his ivory-handled cane and stepped out of *Tardis*. After locking the door, he set off towards the forest. The ground was springy with moss below his feet.

His worst fears about the inhospitable nature of this part of Tiro were realised as he drew near the forest. Before his eyes stretched a nightmarish growth of vine and trees, of mushroom-headed stalks, of gyrating tentacles swaying from every branch and limb.

On the outskirts of this primeval green hell, Dr Who hesitated. It seemed madness to plunge into it. Yet there was no other way round it, according to the microfilm map.

Steeling himself against the horrors which lay ahead, Dr Who plunged into the forest. His feet squelched in mud. The foul stench of rotting vegetation made him choke. He took out his handkerchief and tied it around his face.

As he pressed on, he was careful to avoid going too close to the metal-bodied trees. From past experience he knew that they could move with cunning stealth, though very slowly, once they had selected a victim.

It became darker and darker. Here under a roof of writhing plants and branches, the glare of the twelve stars could not penetrate.

From time to time he checked his direction by the electronic compass which he carried in his pocket.

Suddenly the harsh chittering of an Auroyell made him pause and glance upwards. He knew the trick of these monster birds in diving down upon any moving creature and carrying it away to the filthy eyries on the Alloy Mountain. The Auroyell, its scaly body crouched on a high branch, eyed him with malevolent gaze.

Dr Who raised his cane. "Get away! Go on —you ugly brute!" he yelled.

The bird spread its armoured wings. As Dr Who turned to spring back, a vice closed over his foot and tripped him. He fell, sprawling, his mouth and nostrils filling with stinking mud. . . .

He did not remember anything more for a while.

His first rational thought when he opened his eyes was that he could no longer be on Tiro. There was a roof over his head, so he must be back in *Tardis*. . . .

He struggled to his feet, staring about him, wide-eyed. Directly before him curved a yellowed transparent wall. It was hard and shiny and smooth. Through it he could see a veinous pattern of amber lines. The lines slowly and evilly, like some weird system of arteries, were pumping some kind of life-giving juices.

He turned his head. The yellow wall, which was cup-shaped, encircled him. He was standing on a pulpy mass of slime and small hard bits of unidentifiable material. Above his head the yellow horn-like substance curved into a three-segmented lid. Each segment showed a long, muscular cluster of fibres joining it to the main body, for all the world like a long gate hinge.

Dr Who knew then where he was. After being tripped and stunned by one of the creeper vines, he had been scooped up by one of the huge carnivorous poppy plants.

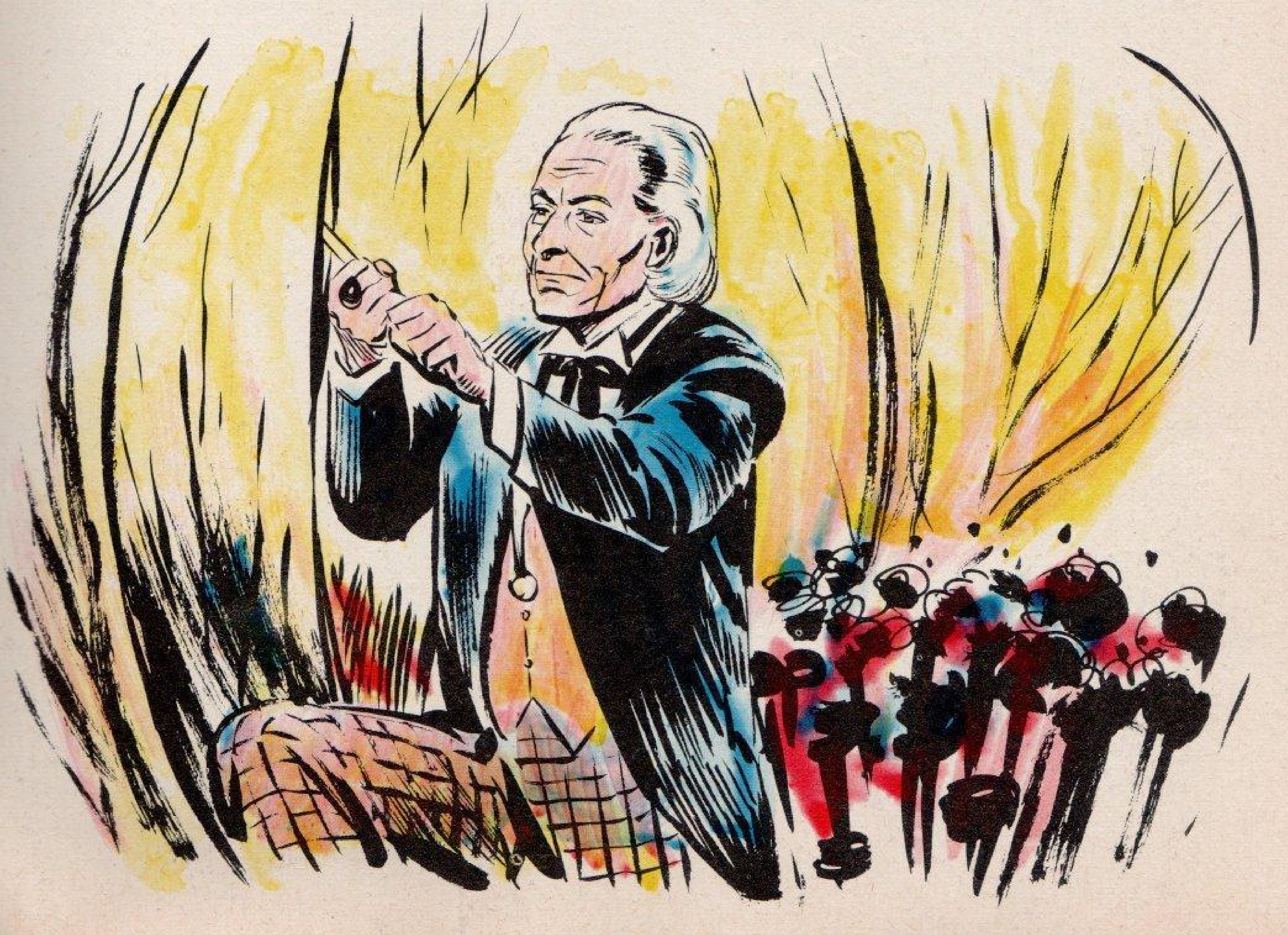
He rapped hard upon the walls of his prison with his cane. He repeated the process as he moved in a circle, and listened each time with great care. Finally he was satisfied.

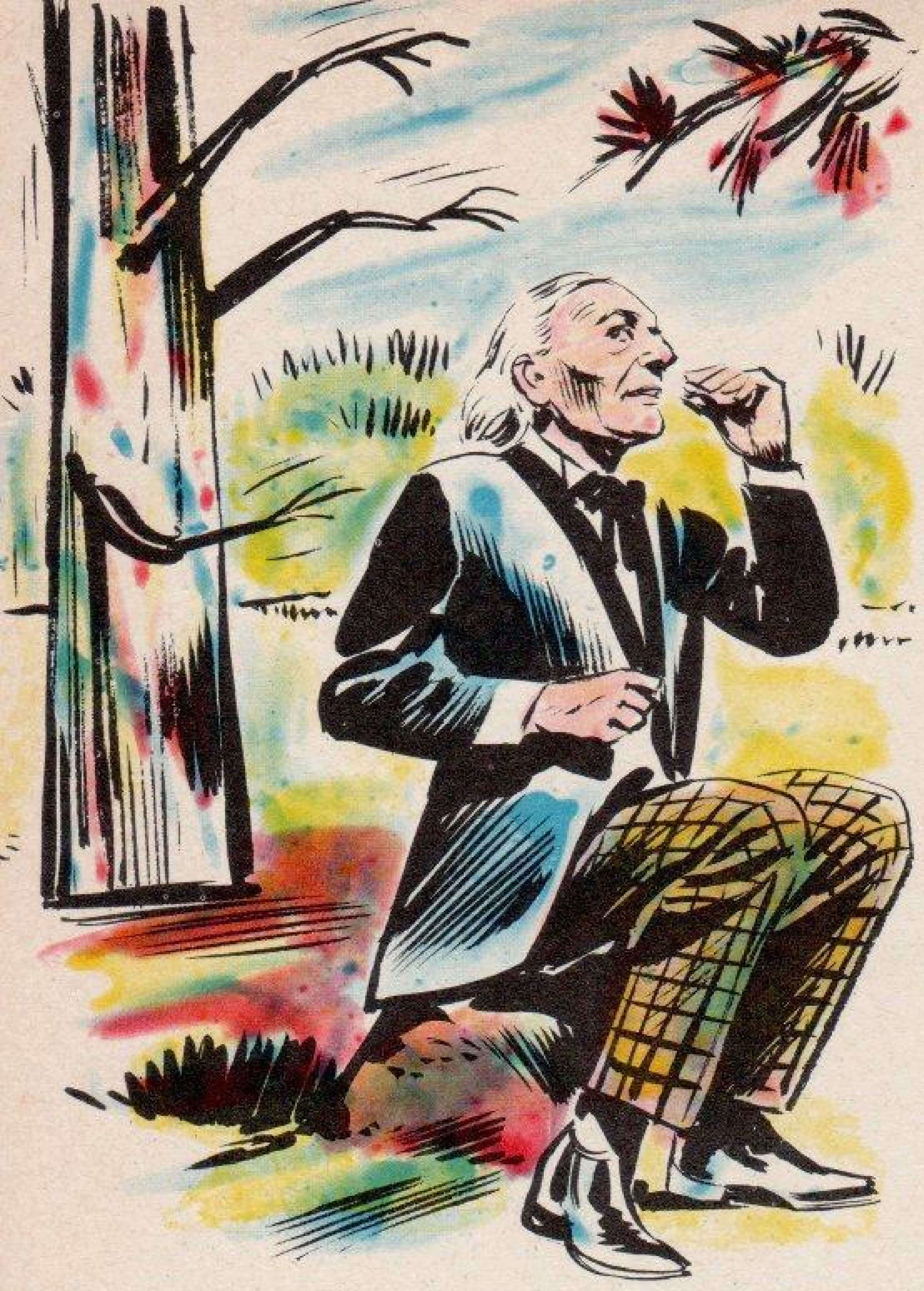
"Well, this appears to be the weakest point," he murmured, "so I had better start from here trying to cut my way out."

Taking his knife from his pocket, he began to hack away on the hard membrane before him. It was a slow job, but at last he raised a long strip of the horn, which he tore away in triumph.

He continued his hacking with redoubled effort. He knew that very soon now the digestive juices of the carnivorous plant would eat through his shoes, and then gradually he would be digested, melted down, reduced to the indignity of a mid-morning snack.

The plant which had imprisoned him began to dislike the work he was doing on its hide. The cup-shaped trap began to sway from side to side. Dr Who felt his knife go right through the





petal. He widened the hole with his cane and peered out. He could make out the ground, slimy and wet, some ten feet below.

He began to wield the knife again. The poppy swayed faster than ever. Then Dr Who lurched forward as the cup dipped. The three-segmented lid sprang open and he was flung out.

Dr Who rose panting to his feet. He picked up his knife from where it had fallen and put it back in his pocket.

"Oh my goodness!" he gasped, as he retrieved his cane from the undergrowth. "I don't wonder that Argon and the Staggs prefer to spend most of their lives in the water, with such hungry neighbours as these all around them!"

He would dearly liked to have rested, but that would be fatal. All around him the carnivorous flower heads were darting and swaying in search of the next meal. Fortunately the Auroyell seemed to have disappeared. . . . Dr Who strode resolutely forward.

He was almost overcome by weariness when he stumbled into a clearing.

"I must rest here and have some food," he told himself.

In the centre of the clearing he was surprised to find a large pool of clear water. He sank down upon its banks and, taking his food tablets from his pocket, he selected a meal of Simozian Sturgeon, prepared on his last visit to the planet Roe. It had all the full flavour of the giant fish, and Dr Who was enjoying himself immensely when he chanced to gaze down into the pool. What he saw there made him freeze with astonishment.

"What—what. . . !" His voice was a trembling whisper. He looked closer. There was no mistake. Far below him, in the depth of the clear pool, figures were moving slowly across his line of vision.

Suddenly he spotted the web-like feet, the fin-like appendages, and the pointed heads with their long side-gills. He scrambled to his feet with a glad cry. "Argon! Argon! It's the Staggs!"

He began to wave his arms and shout down into the water. "Hello! Can you hear me? I'm up here! Argon!"

His hopes sank when he saw that the shimmering figures far below in the water could not hear him. Having crossed the bottom of the pool, they vanished one by one into the shadows.

Dr Who sank down dejectedly. In bitter silence he munched a tablet of exotic fruits, scarcely appreciating the exquisite flavours released in his mouth.

He was lost in thought when a faint rustle from behind warned him of the ever-present dangers. He rolled clear and scrambled to his feet. One of the mobile trees had inched its way across the clearing, branches ready to grasp and tear him to pieces.

Dr Who took a deep breath. "Hm! I can see there will be no relaxation for me until I get through this dreadful forest," he pondered. "But what is the use of going on if Argon and the Staggs are at the bottom of that pool?"

He checked his compass, and made a quick reckoning from the micro-map. There was not far to go before he would be clear of the forest. Then he might pick up some sign of the Staggs. He decided to press on.

He was utterly weary by the time the nightmare journey was done.

Staggering from the fringe of the forest, he threw himself down on the ground. He could have gone to sleep on the spot. But he knew that was impossible. Even here in the open there were dangers. He must find some form of shelter.

Dr Who looked around. If he were to follow his compass direction, he would soon be climbing the foothills of the towering Alloy Mountain.

"But I don't think I have the strength to climb!" he told himself.

Dotted about the slopes of the foothills he could see large green balls. For a moment he was puzzled as to what they could be. Then he recognised them. "Ah! Now I remember—giant cabbage plants," he mused.

The words sank slowly into his tired brain. Then they crystallised into an idea which brought new hope surging through him.

"Why yes! Of course! Those are the plants which open out in the light and then roll into a ball! If I can get inside one, I might snatch the sleep I need without fear of attack!"

He pressed on up the slopes. A glance skyward told him that of the twelve orbiting stars which provided Tiro with its constant glaring daylight, six or more had reached a stage in their ellipses when much of their light was lost to this side of the mountain. In short, this was as close to night as this planet would ever come.

Dr Who broke into a run. He could see that the giant cabbage nearest to him was already reacting to the loss of light. The huge leaves, which had been spread wide to cover hundreds of square feet of ground, were now beginning to curl inwards.

He reached the spot and managed to grasp one edge of a leathery leaf. Hauling himself over the edge he rolled down into the heart of the cabbage. . . .

It was warm and soft. For a moment Dr Who was tempted to close his eyes and go straight to sleep. But his sense of danger would not let him rest yet.

Already the green leaf was curling over his head. The little space in which he lay would soon become more cramped as the leaves pressed down. He must find some way to prevent himself being stifled and crushed.

"I have it!" He picked up his cane, smiling to himself. "The very thing!"

He propped the cane upright and held it there until the leaves had closed tighter, holding it in place. He had constructed a kind of small tent!

Five minutes later he was asleep.

His dreams were deep but disturbed. It seemed that he found himself astride one of the loathsome Auroyells as it winged its way on ponderous wings over jagged peaks. Suddenly from every peak there sprang other Auroyells, and astride each one was a Stagg.

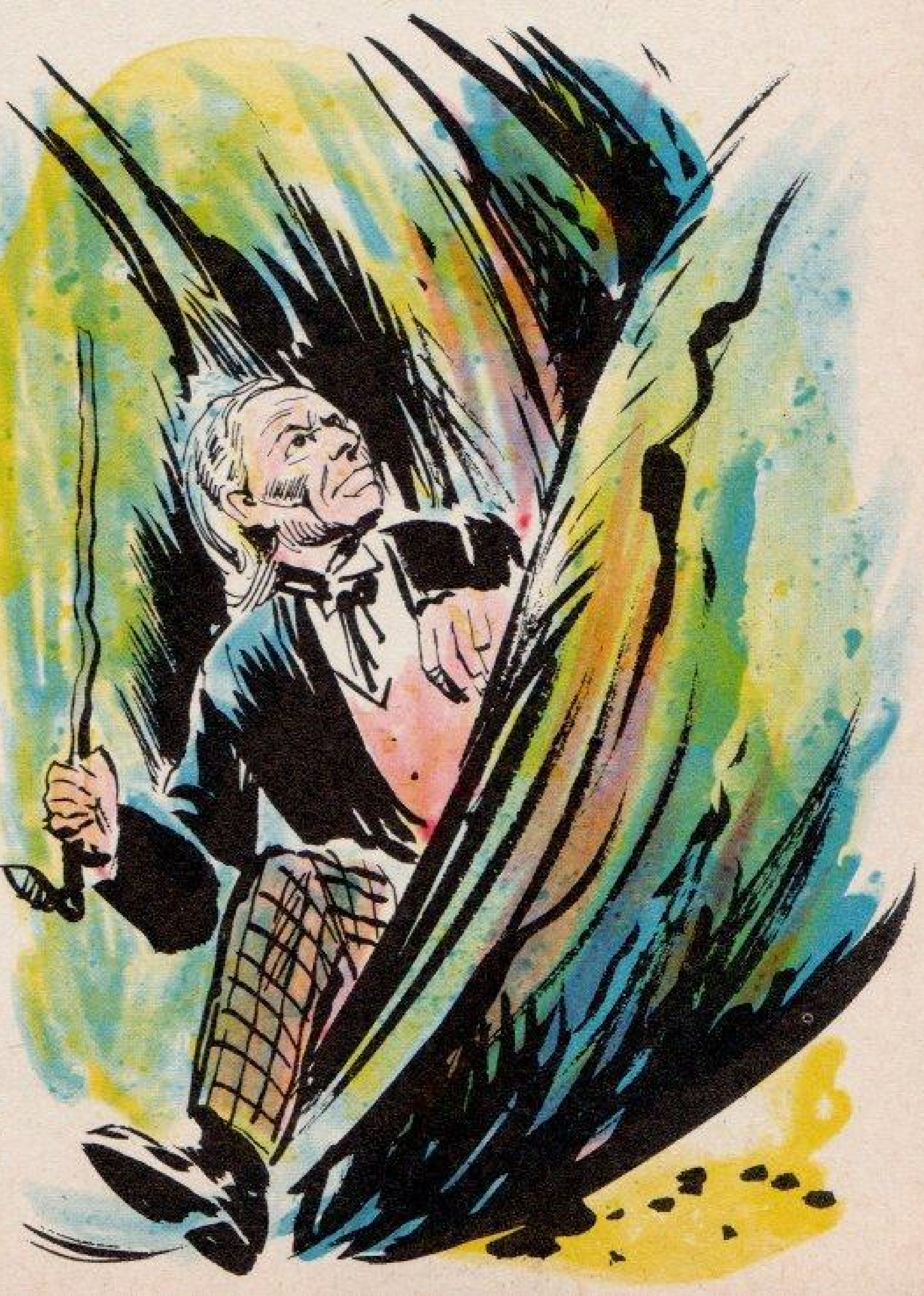
Dr Who raised his arm and shouted a welcome. But a hail of darts fell about him, and the Staggs only screamed with fury. Then followed a frantic chase, with Dr Who urging on his bird and the Staggs closing in around him. . . .

Suddenly he lost his grip and fell from his perch. He plunged downwards, turning over and over and over. . . .

He awoke in a sweat of fear. For a few nightmare seconds the dream clung to him, for he was, in fact, turning over and over.

Then he realised what must be happening: the giant cabbage was rolling, or being rolled, down a slope.

The resilient walls of his tiny prison ensured that he was not hurt by the tumbling motion. Nevertheless he was greatly relieved when at last the cabbage came to rest, and he was able to stand upright and dust his clothes.



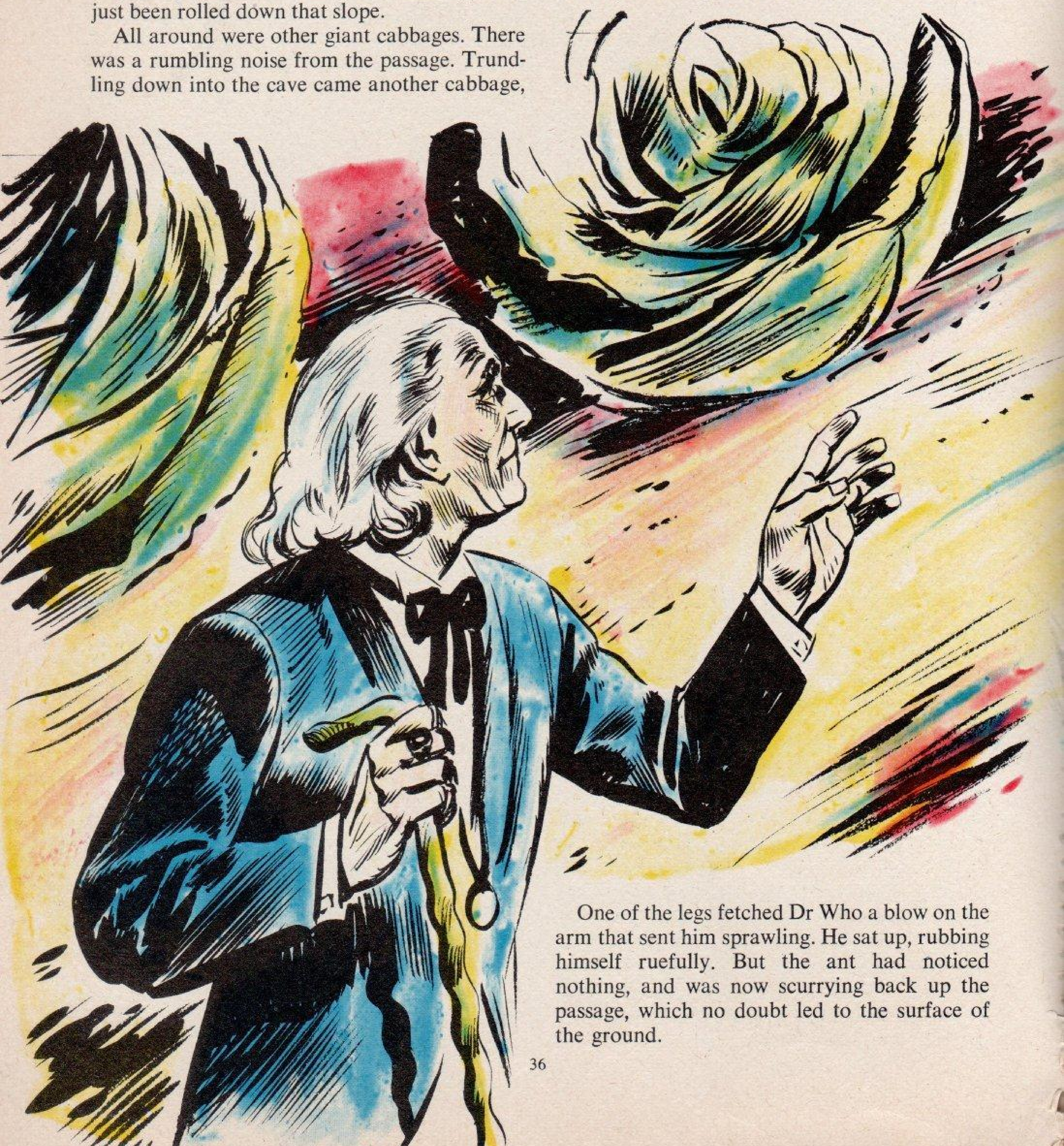
Once again he produced his knife, and began to carve his way out. The leathery leaves were simple compared with the horn-like petals of the carnivorous poppy. Soon Dr Who was able to step cautiously through the hole he had carved.

He stared around him. He was in some kind of cave at the end of a long passage which sloped upwards. Obviously the cabbage had just been rolled down that slope.

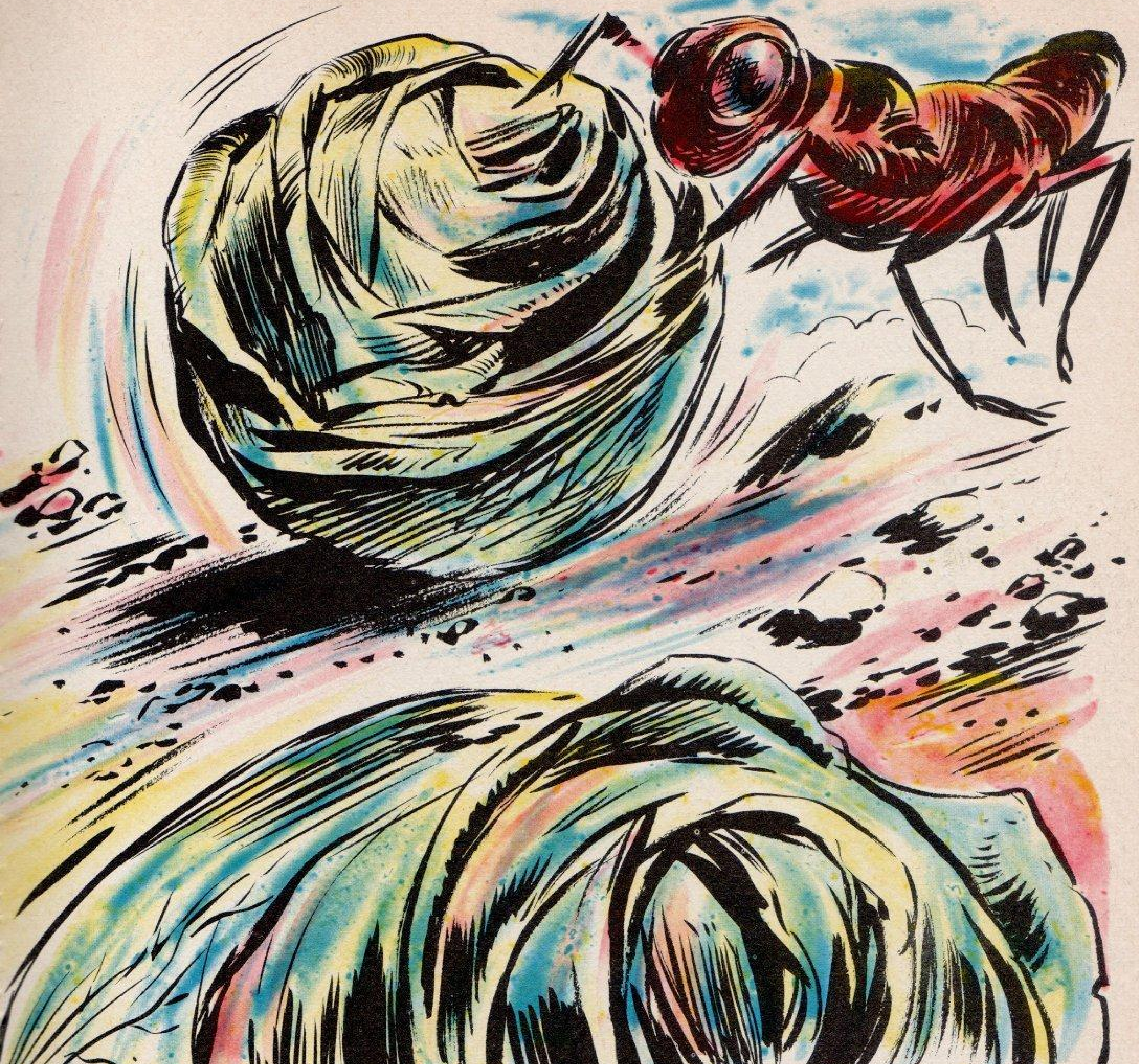
All around were other giant cabbages. There was a rumbling noise from the passage. Trundling down into the cave came another cabbage, propelled by the powerful legs of a monster ant.

"My goodness!" marvelled Dr Who. "I had forgotten how huge these insects are on Tiro. They are every bit as big and fearsome as the Zarbi on Vortis!"

He dodged out of sight as the ant came scurrying towards him, its six legs touching each of the giant cabbages in its larder, as if to make sure by counting that it had not been robbed.



One of the legs fetched Dr Who a blow on the arm that sent him sprawling. He sat up, rubbing himself ruefully. But the ant had noticed nothing, and was now scurrying back up the passage, which no doubt led to the surface of the ground.



Dr Who grasped his cane and made for the passage.

"I must get out of here before that insect tries to roll another giant cabbage down here," he told himself. "No time to waste!"

He toiled up the slope, noticing that light was filtered into this underground 'ant city' by means of shafts sunk vertically from the hill-slopes.

The slope levelled off into a passage. As he walked along it Dr Who saw that it was honeycombed with side-passages.

A scuffling noise made him halt. A monster ant had emerged from one of the other passages only ten paces from him.

There was no time to hide. The great shining black compound eyes were already focused upon him. A jointed leg shot out. Dr Who ducked, and the leg whistled over his head and smacked against the wall, dislodging rocks and earth.

He made a dive for one of the side-passages. As he raced down it, he heard the monster scuttering after him. Fortunately the passage began to grow narrower. He could hear the ant's shell catching against rocks with a metallic ring. Then Dr Who tripped and went sprawling. . . .

For a moment he lay, half expecting to feel the crushing blows of those six massive legs, and the slicing agony of the dreaded mandibles. But when he looked up, he was relieved to see that the monstrous insect had become firmly jammed in its efforts to penetrate the narrow passage.

Thankfully Dr Who scrambled to his feet. He ran on. Other passages opened up before him. But he hesitated as a shrill, unearthly scream came from one of the passages. It made his blood run cold with fear. Yet there was such a note of pathetic agony about it, that Dr Who could not ignore it. He strode resolutely towards the scream.

An invisible light source glowed at the end of the passage. Dazzled after walking in semi-darkness for so long, Dr Who paused and shielded his eyes. As he did so, he was seized from behind by clammy arms. . . . Or were they arms? For, as he sought to free himself from the grip, Dr Who discovered he was being pinioned by fin-like appendages.

A startling thought flashed into his mind as he went down under the weight of half a dozen chill bodies.

"Wait! Wait!" he managed to gasp. "It's Argon, isn't it? Aren't you the Staggs?"

His attackers withdrew at once, voicing their astonishment in the gurgling whispers which Dr Who remembered so well. He sat up, gasping for breath, but he managed a smile at the fish-like creatures standing around him.

One of them, taller than the rest, stepped forward with an eager gurgle: "Dr Who!"

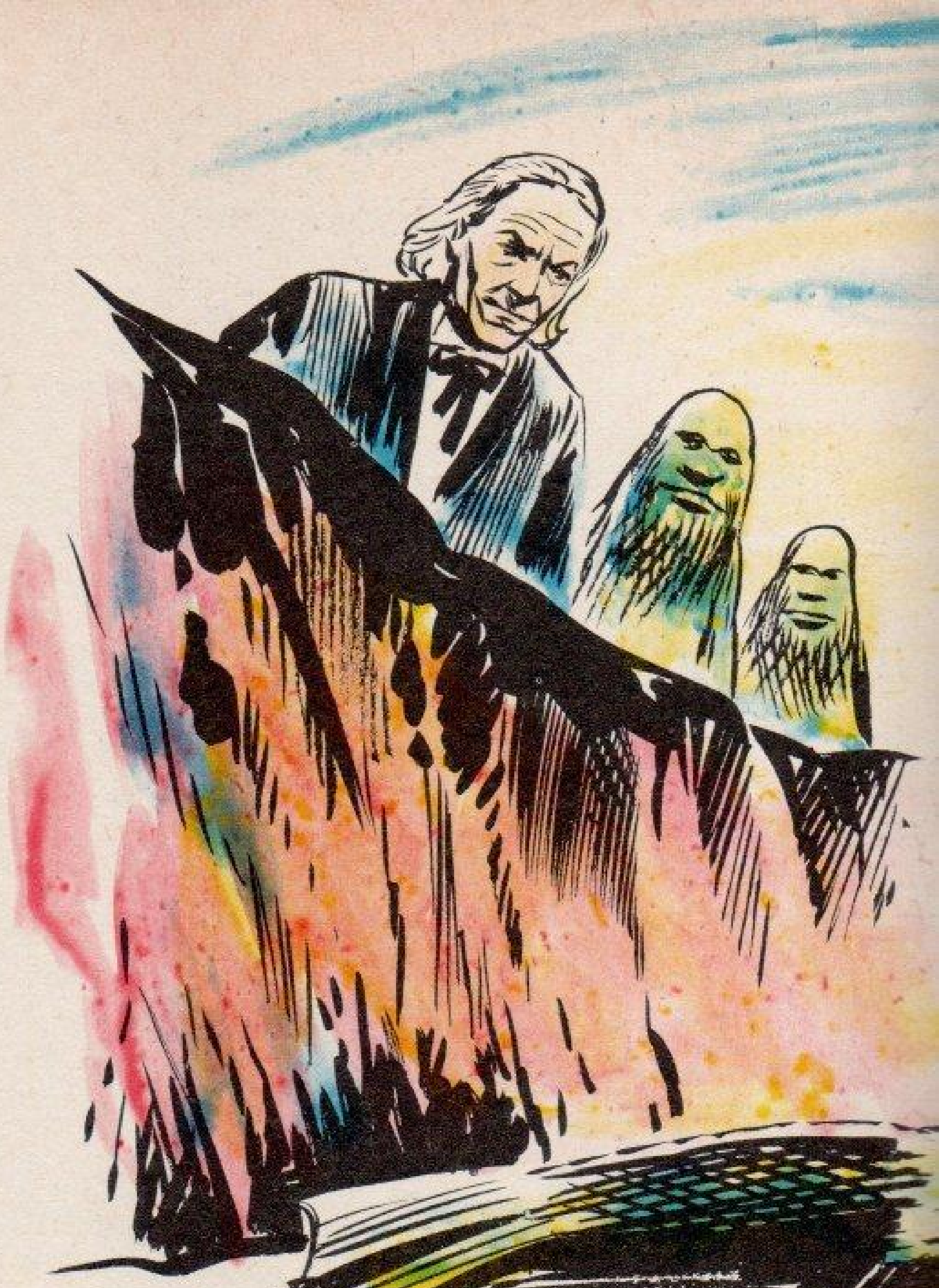
Willing fins helped him to his feet. "I—I can't believe it!" gurgled Argon. "Is it really you, Doctor?"

"Yes, it's really me, Argon," said Dr Who. "And thank goodness I've found you."

"But what are you doing here? When did you return to Tiro? How did you find us? How——"

Dr Who cut off the flood of questions with a wave of his hand.

"Not so fast, Argon," he said testily. "Just how I came to be down here in the bowels of the planet would take too long to explain. But I was on my way to find you, after *Tardis* materialised on the wrong side of Alloy Mountain. . . . I had a dreadful time coming through the forest. But I saw you walking about the bottom of a pool there! How can that be?"



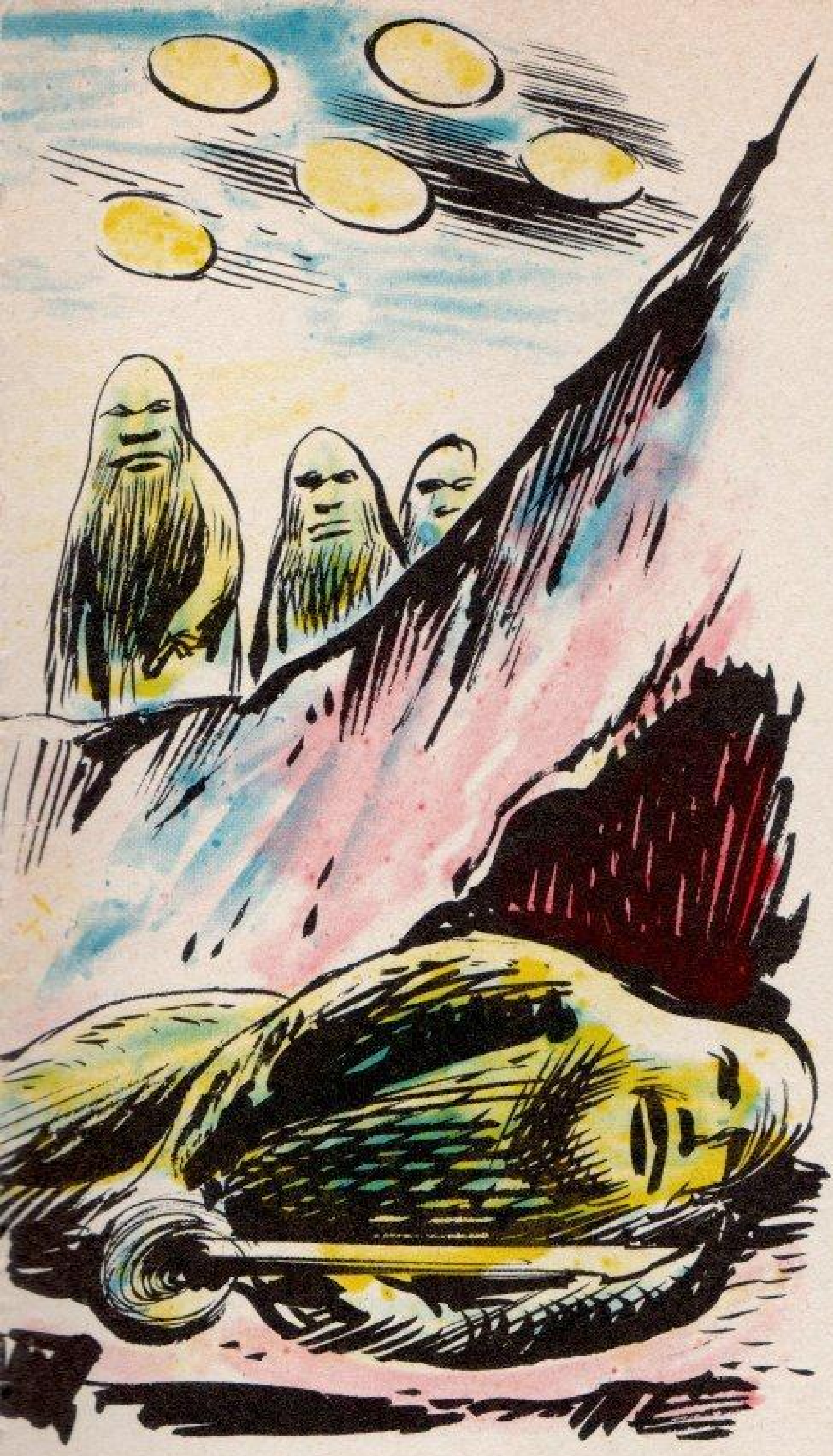
The Staggs whispered together, pointing to a passage that led to an upper level.

Argon explained: "We were not at the bottom of the pool, Doctor. What you saw was our reflection as we made our way here through the water-filled passages that lead from our home lake."

Dr Who nodded. "I see. . . . But what brings you here, Argon? And what was the scream I heard?"

The tall amphibian motioned him to follow. "Crouch low!" he gurgled. "And make no sign. I will show you a horror you have never met with in all your travels! Come!"

Dr Who obediently crept after him. The floor of the tunnel sloped up gently for a while, then levelled, then turned downwards again. The walls were vertical and perfect, with a smooth glazed look. The ceiling curved from wall to wall in a perfect arc, and it was aglow with light. It opened into a high-ceilinged chamber, and it was from the smooth walls of this strange place that the light was emanating.



Dr Who saw that Argon had drawn a gun from his belt and was holding it in readiness. He wriggled towards a pillar, motioning Dr Who to do likewise. They huddled close, looking around them.

The chamber bore the stamp of an earlier civilisation. The rock had been smoothed to take primitive murals, showing strange creatures in various hunting scenes. A part of Dr Who's mind admired the basic techniques. Outlines in low relief had been cut into the rock, details delicately etched in and colours brought up, apparently by altering the composition of the rock itself.

At the far end of the chamber the wall was pierced with perfectly circular openings of various sizes. Below them the rock floor opened into some sort of pit, and it was towards this pit that the Stagg leader now gestured.

Sprawled on the edge of the pit, Dr Who now saw the body of one of the amphibians. He had his gun in his fins, and had apparently died fighting. . . . Dr Who realised that this was the reason for the awful scream he had heard.

"What—?" he began. But Argon gestured in warning.

"Ssh! Watch! It is coming again!"

An eerie glow of greenish light was coming from the pit. Slowly its source came into sight —a ball of dazzling brilliance, oval and about the size of a man's torso. But as it emerged into the chamber, it seemed to grow rapidly. It swelled until its extremities almost touched the walls.

It looked like incandescent metal, but Dr Who somehow felt that it wasn't hot. It seemed to move at will and to hover without support.

In his eagerness to see more, Dr Who moved without thinking away from the pillar. A rumble came from the Hovering Mystery. Something resembling a tentacle lifted, clutching an object that resembled a flashlight. A blinding lance of heat shot towards Dr Who. . . .

It hit the rock close to his feet. A sound came from the rock like ice pressed upon a hot stove. Smoke puffed upward. A long curved scar opened up.

Dr Who was almost swept off his feet as Argon hauled him to safety.

They lay crouched behind the pillar for a few moments. Then Argon peered out, ready to fire back. . . . But there was no need. The object had vanished back into the pit.

Dr Who would have lingered but the amphibian pulled him urgently from the chamber.

"My dear Argon, that was absolutely astounding. . . . What in the great wide galaxy was it?" asked Dr Who.

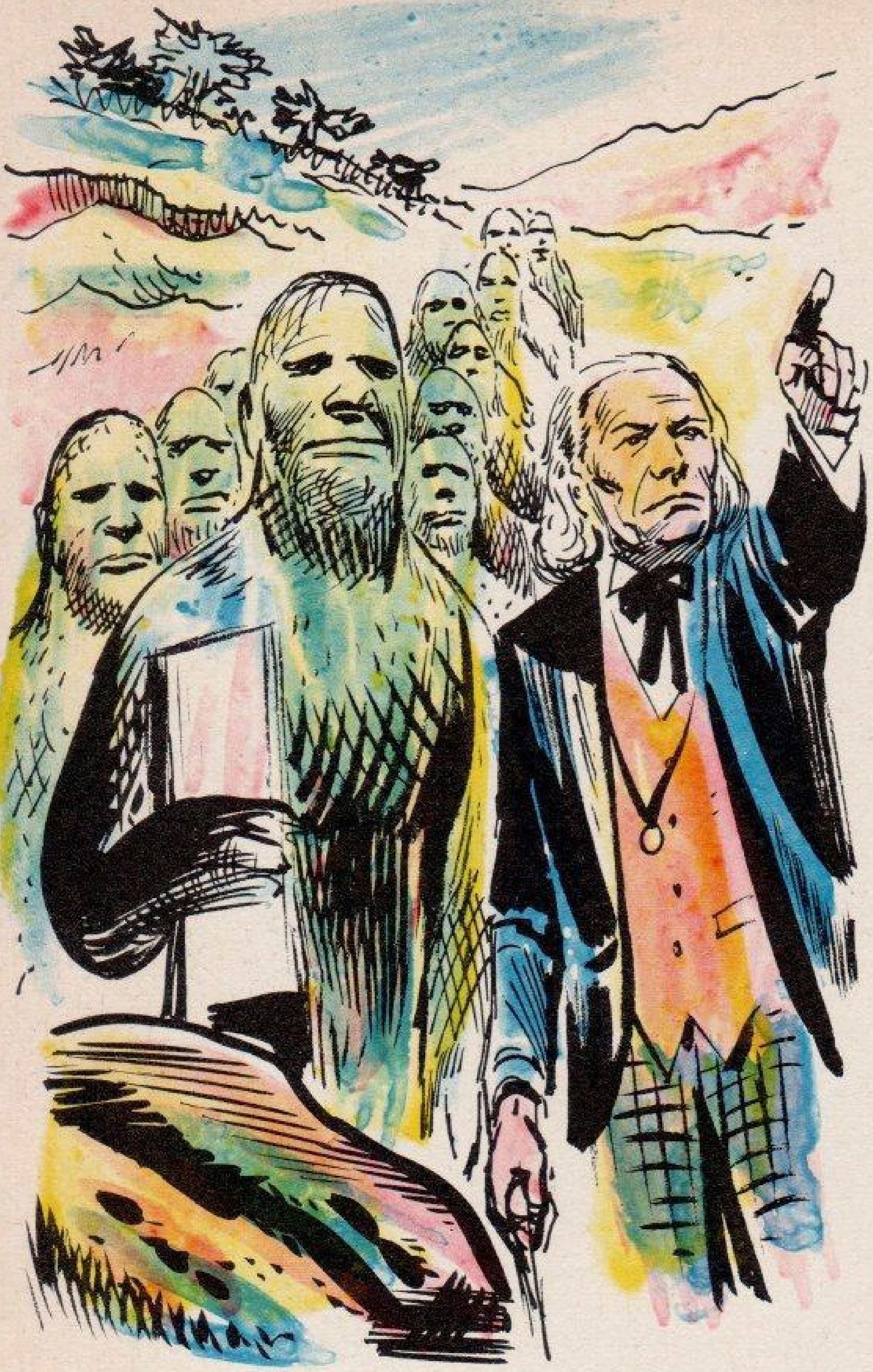
Argon holstered his gun and said slowly: "You remember Klarimo?"

Dr Who's brow wrinkled. Then he remembered. "Klarimo! Ah yes! The scientific genius sent from the Outerfringe Star Cluster. Let me see, didn't he come here to—er—subjugate your planet?"

Argon nodded grimly. "He did! And a great deal of damage he did before we could convince him that he was not wanted."

Dr Who nodded. "Yes, yes . . . I remember now. . . . But—what has he got to do with that thing in the cave there?"

Argon's side-gills contracted slowly. "That thing in the cave *is* Klarimo!"



Dr Who stepped back, astounded. "Oh surely not! Klarimo was withdrawn back to the Outerfringe Star Cluster. We saw him disembodied and taken home by the Molecular Shaft."

"So we all thought." Argon nodded grimly. "But after you had left us, our lakes began to be poisoned. My people began to grow ill. Some died. . . . At last we traced the source of the evil to this cave directly under the Alloy Mountain. . . . As you probably noticed, it was carved out by primitive tribes on this planet. . . . But that thing living in the pit is Klarimo. And his presence is contaminating our underwater homes, through the water-filled passages that run from here."

Dr Who ran a brisk hand over his fine mane of white hair. "Klarimo, eh? Amazing! But, yes, I see now, the re-arrangement of his molecules would produce just such a grotesque appearance as that."

Cold rage showed in the amphibian's opaque green eyes. "But why did he remain to wreak such vengeance on us?" he stormed. "It was agreed with the Galactic Arbitrators, and with the Outerfringe Council, that Klarimo should be withdrawn."

Dr Who waved a hand excitedly. "Yes, but wait a minute, Argon. . . . Let me think a moment. . . . The Molecular Shaft worked on the principle of withdrawal, did it not?"

"Of course! An object, or being is disembodied, and the molecules drawn up the shaft."

"Ah! But that may be the trouble!" Dr Who spoke excitedly.

"What do you mean?" demanded Argon.

"Well, supposing there was a mistake in operating the Shaft. Suppose the action was reversed. . . . What would happen then, eh?"

Argon stared at him. "Well . . . I suppose that instead of being drawn upwards, the molecules would be propelled downwards!"

Dr Who rubbed his hands together in satisfaction. "Exactly! They would be, very possibly, propelled into that chamber, eh?"

The truth of what he was saying dawned quickly upon the amphibian leader. "You're right! That must be the answer to the mystery. . . . But what can we do about it?"

Dr Who answered: "Did you notice a hole in the roof of the chamber?"

The other nodded. "What about it?"

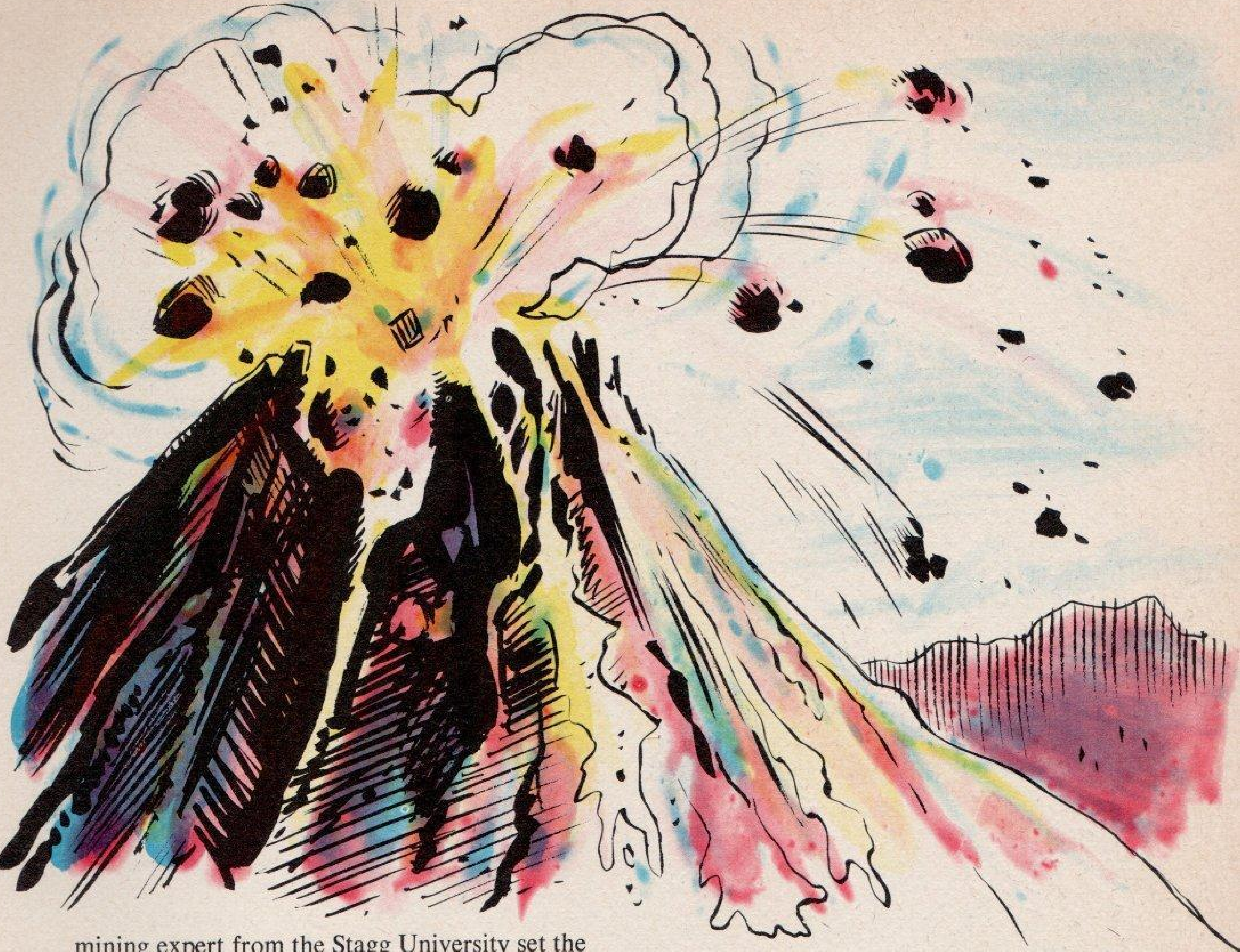
"Well, that is the main conduit left by a form of volcanic eruption long ago," said Dr Who. "My theory is that it leads to a crater somewhere near the top of Alloy Mountain, but that the top of the conduit is sealed off with a plug of solidified magma and lava."

Argon looked at him with something close to awe in his eyes. "You are perfectly correct, Doctor," he acknowledged. "I know the crater well."

The other nodded, well satisfied. "Very good! Then here is my idea: if we could blow that plug out and leave the conduit free again——"

"Then Klarimo could emerge and return to his base!" cried Argon. "Of course! It is a brilliant idea! Come, we must not delay. Let us get out of this accursed place, and put the plan into operation."

It took them two hours to return to the City of the Staggs. Then, after a brief meal, they set out for the mountain top with the explosives. A



mining expert from the Stagg University set the charges—and everyone retired to the shelter of a neighbouring peak.

When the charges went off it seemed as if half the mountain top must have been blown away. Rocks were violently ejected from the vent, followed by finer lava dust. The Strombolian-type eruption continued for a full ten minutes. When the smoke and dust haze had cleared, the observers examined their work through powerful glasses.

"Good! Very good!" murmured Dr Who. "If only the explosion hasn't blocked the lower part of the conduit."

They kept their glasses trained on the mountain top, waiting tensely for something to happen.

"There!" A gurgling cry left Argon's lips as he saw the oval shape that was Klarimo emerging from the crater.

It was no longer glowing, and it lifted fast towards the lip of the crater. They saw it gleam for a moment as it cleared the rocks. Then the watchers snatched their glasses away and rubbed their eyes as the oval shape vanished in a blinding flash.

When they could look again there was nothing to be seen.

Argon turned towards Dr Who and touched him gratefully on the shoulder with his fin.

"My dear friend," he said. "Is there anything we can do to repay you for solving our problem like this?"

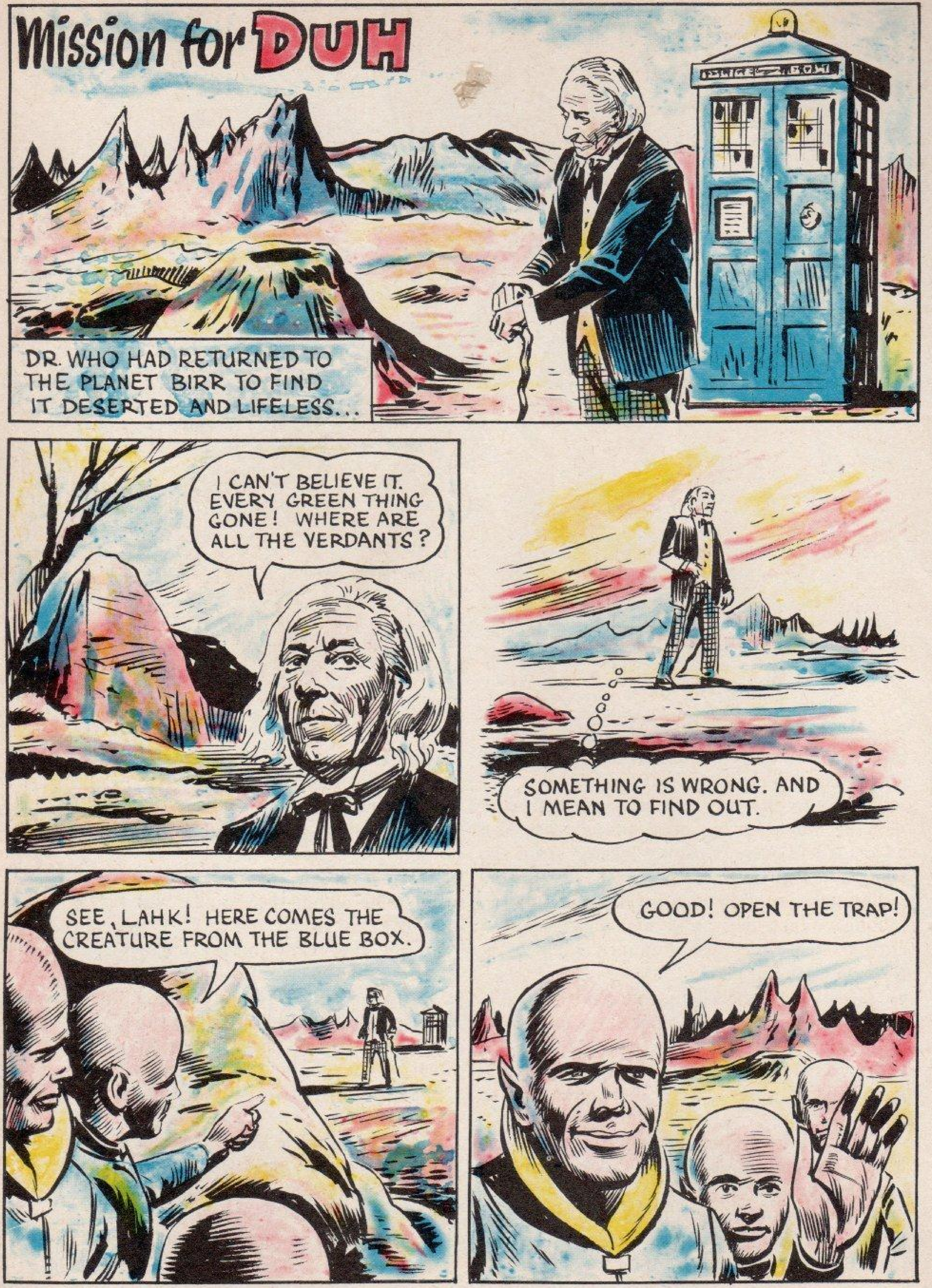
Dr Who smiled. He put a hand into his inside pocket and took out the klister valve.

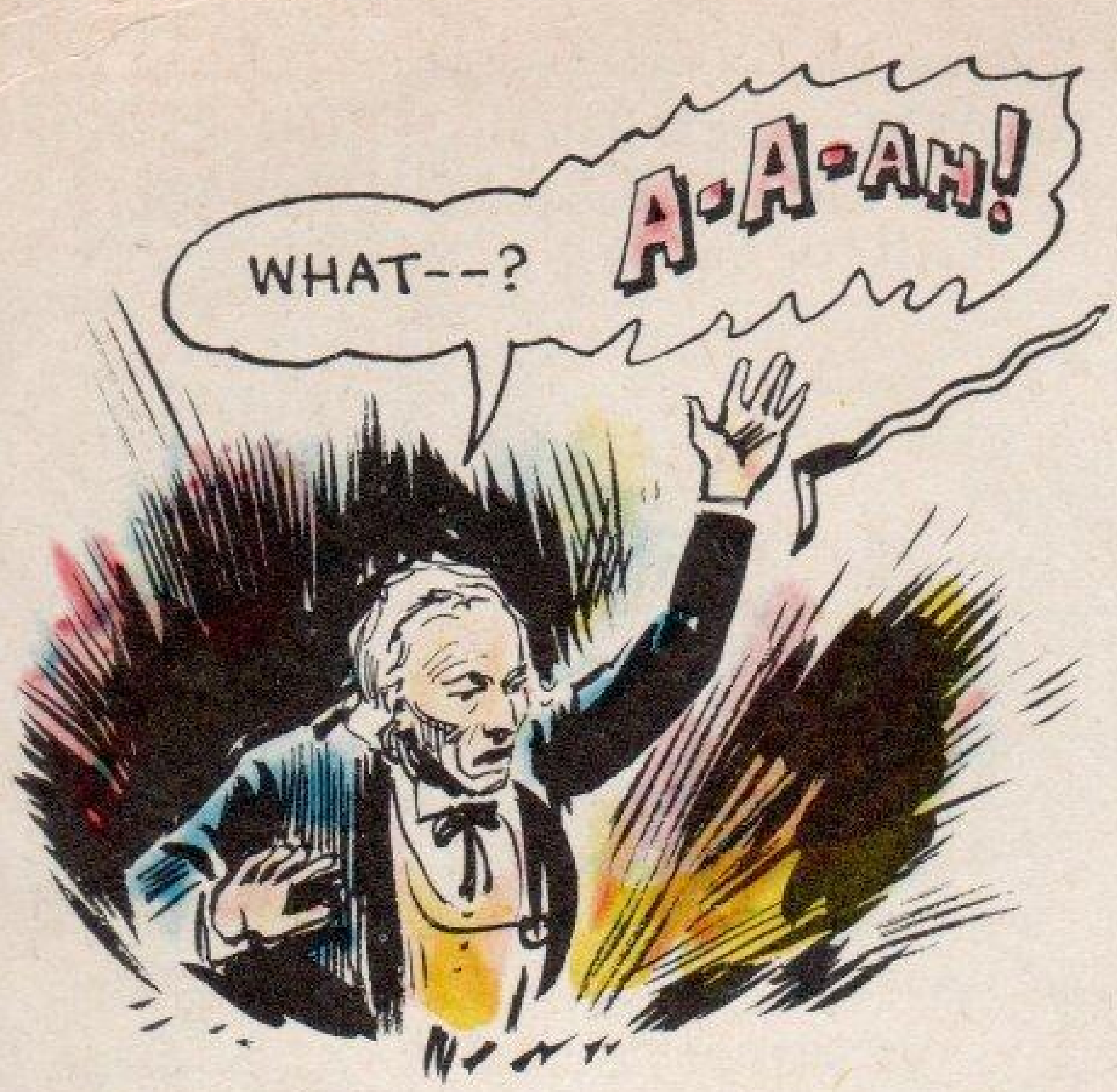
"Yes, Argon. There is something you can do . . . I need a few drops of liquid Magnatite to repair this valve. Without it, my *Tardis* is grounded!"

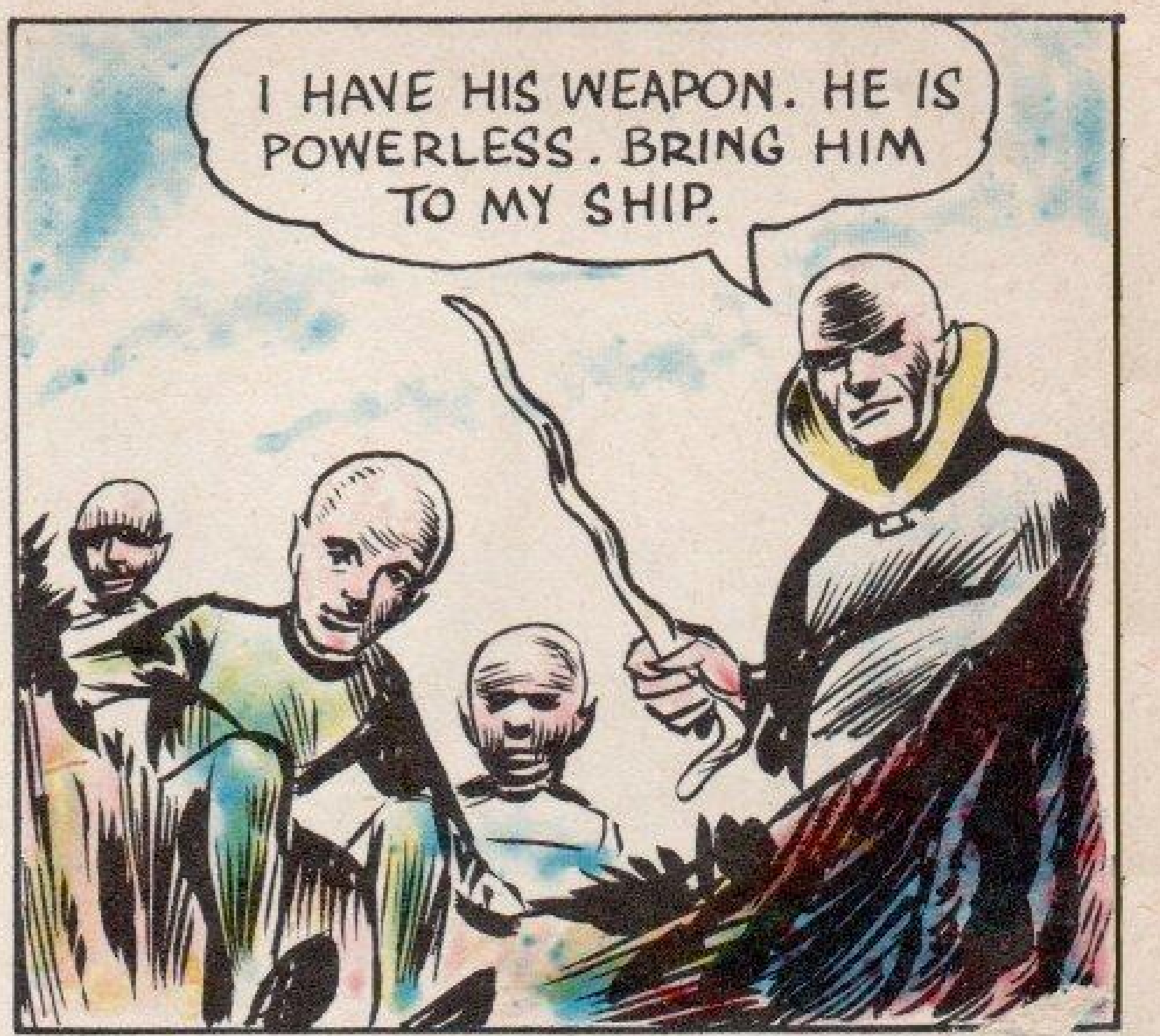
Argon's chuckle bubbled out of him. "A few drops? Why, my dear Doctor, you can take as much as you want, a shipload, if you like."

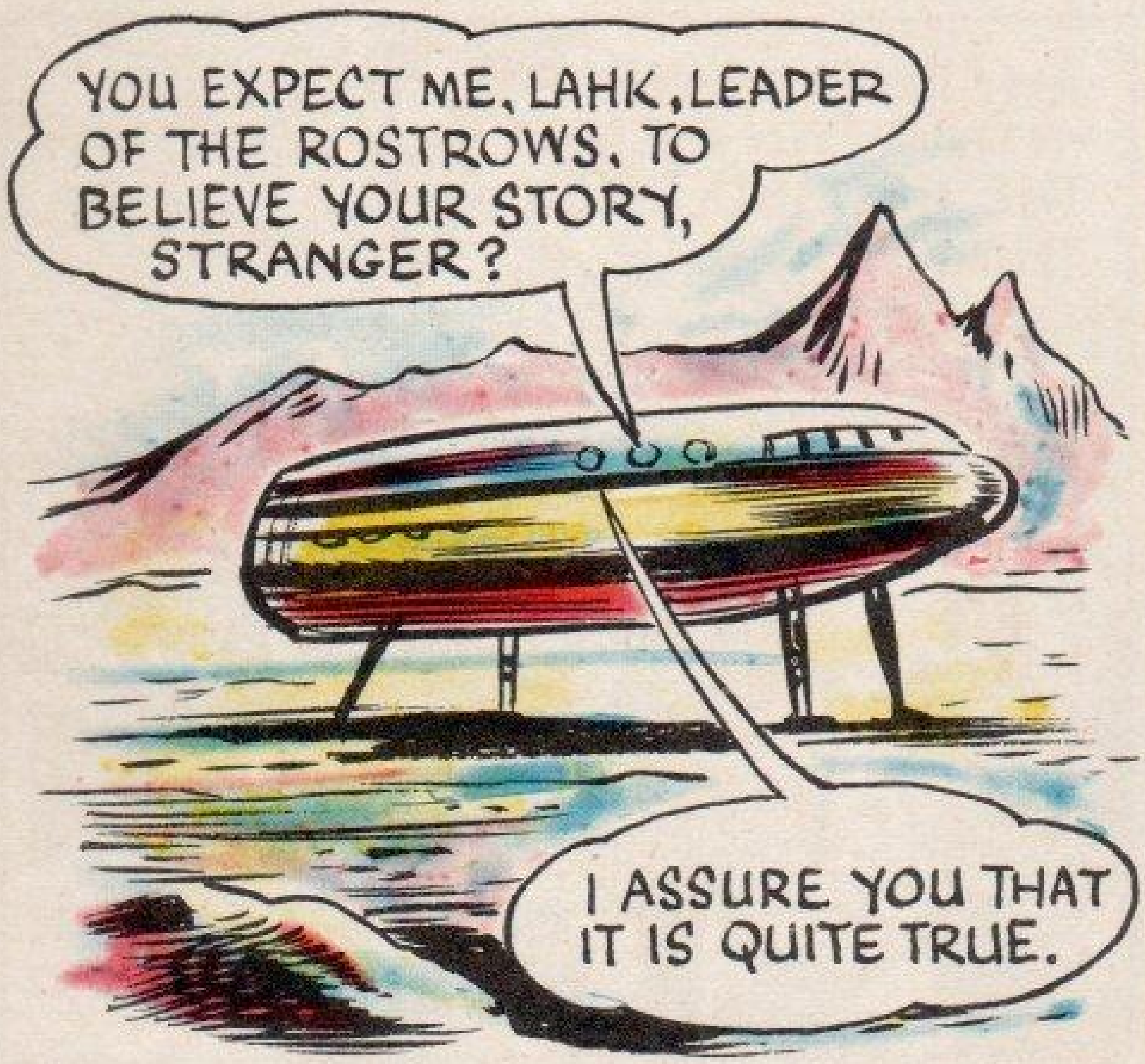
"No, thank you," said Dr Who. "Just enough to ensure that my travels won't be interrupted again!"

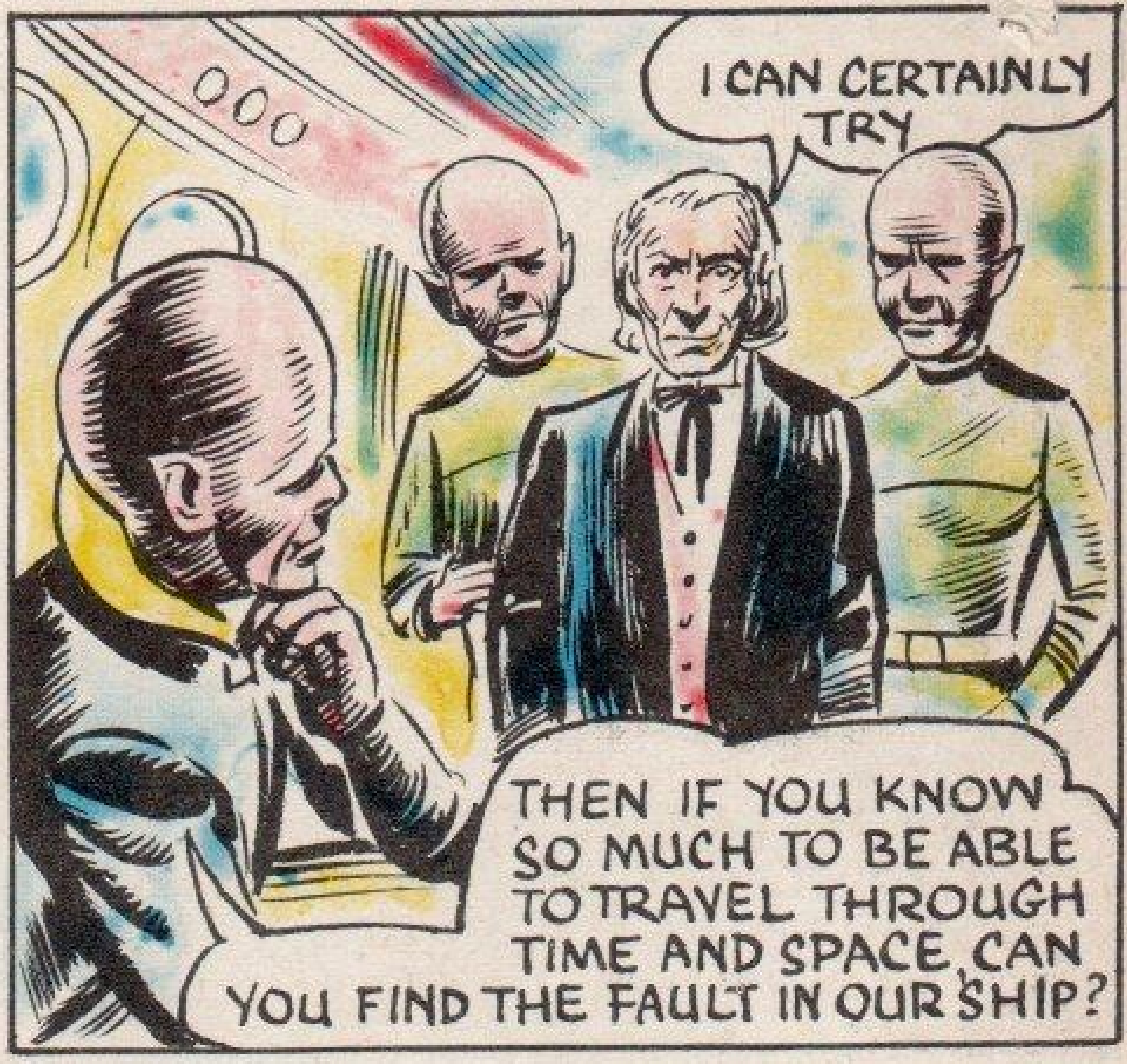
Mission for DUH

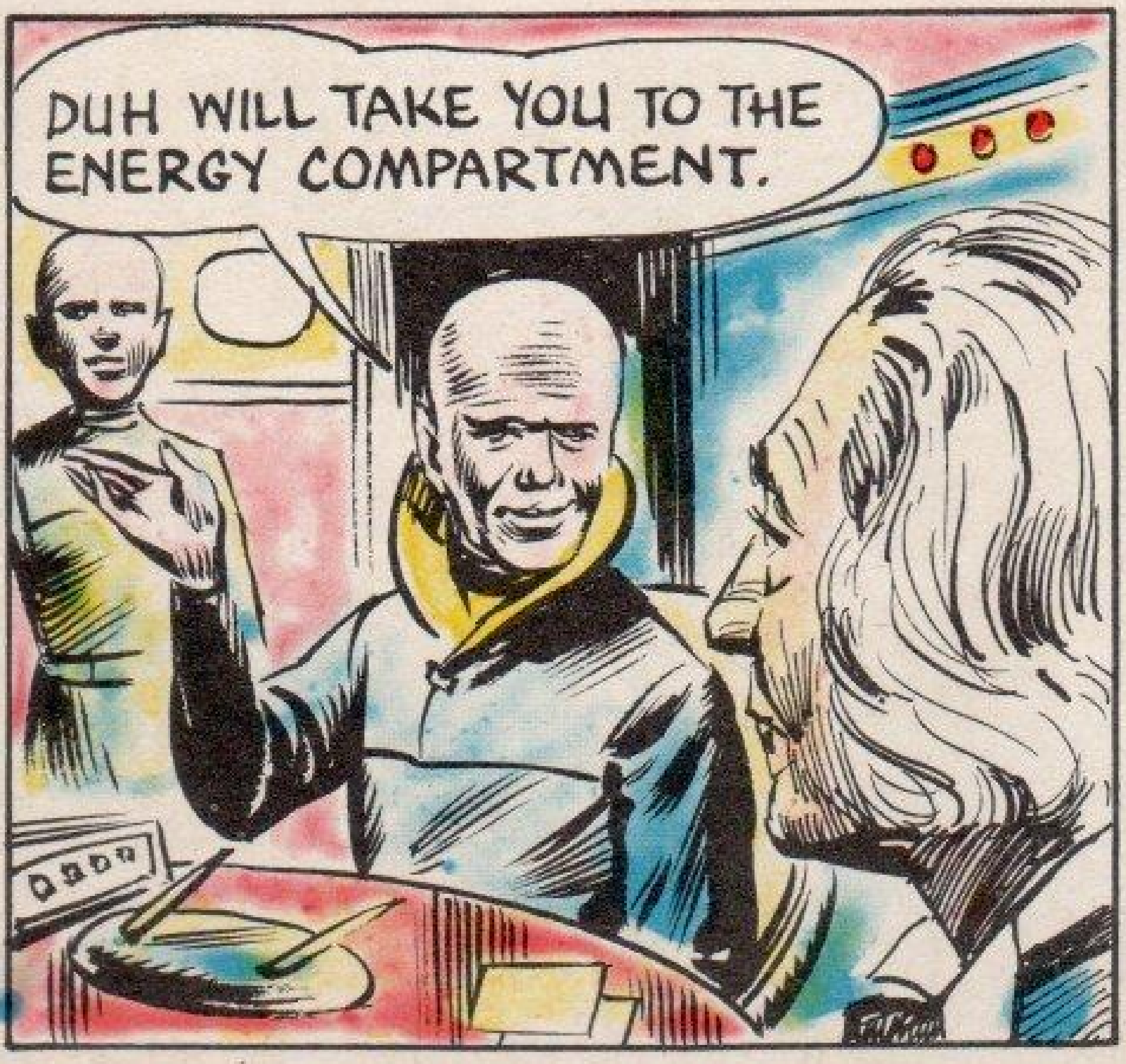

DR. WHO HAD RETURNED TO THE PLANET BIRR TO FIND IT DESERTED AND LIFELESS...
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT. EVERY GREEN THING GONE! WHERE ARE ALL THE VERDANTS?
SOMETHING IS WRONG. AND I MEAN TO FIND OUT.
SEE, LAHK! HERE COMES THE CREATURE FROM THE BLUE BOX.
GOOD! OPEN THE TRAP!

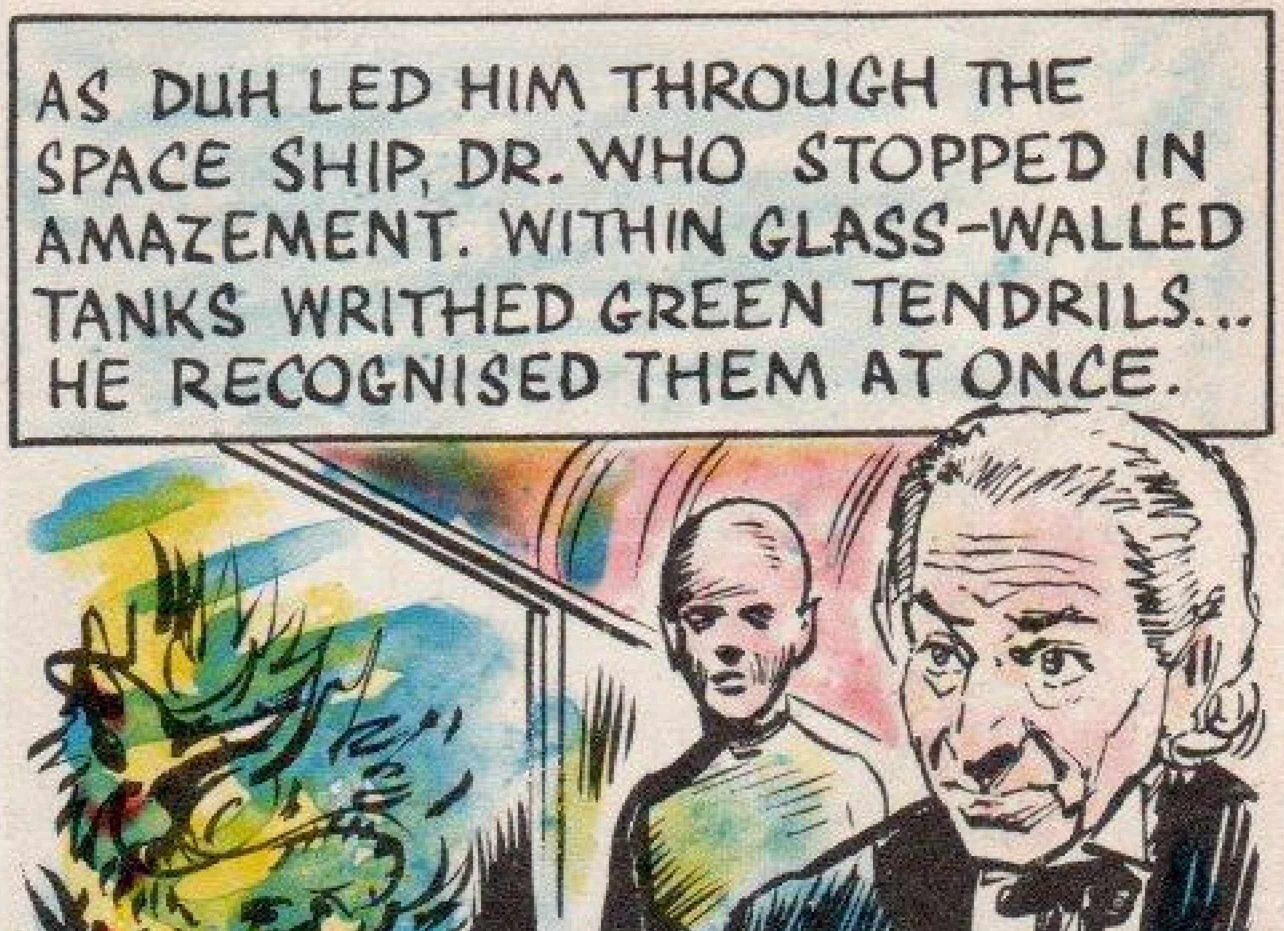

WHAT--?
A-A-AH!

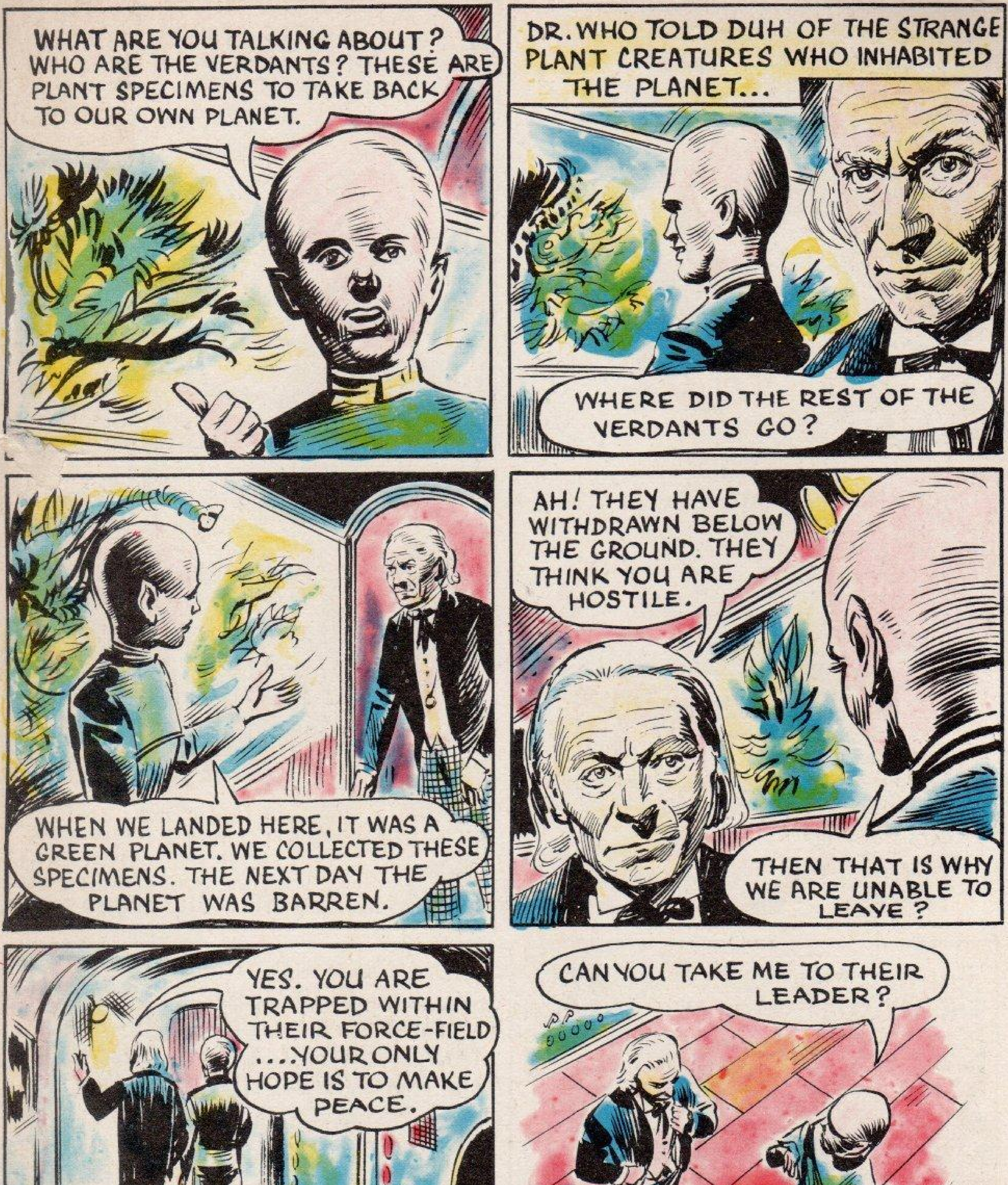

I HAVE HIS WEAPON. HE IS POWERLESS. BRING HIM TO MY SHIP.

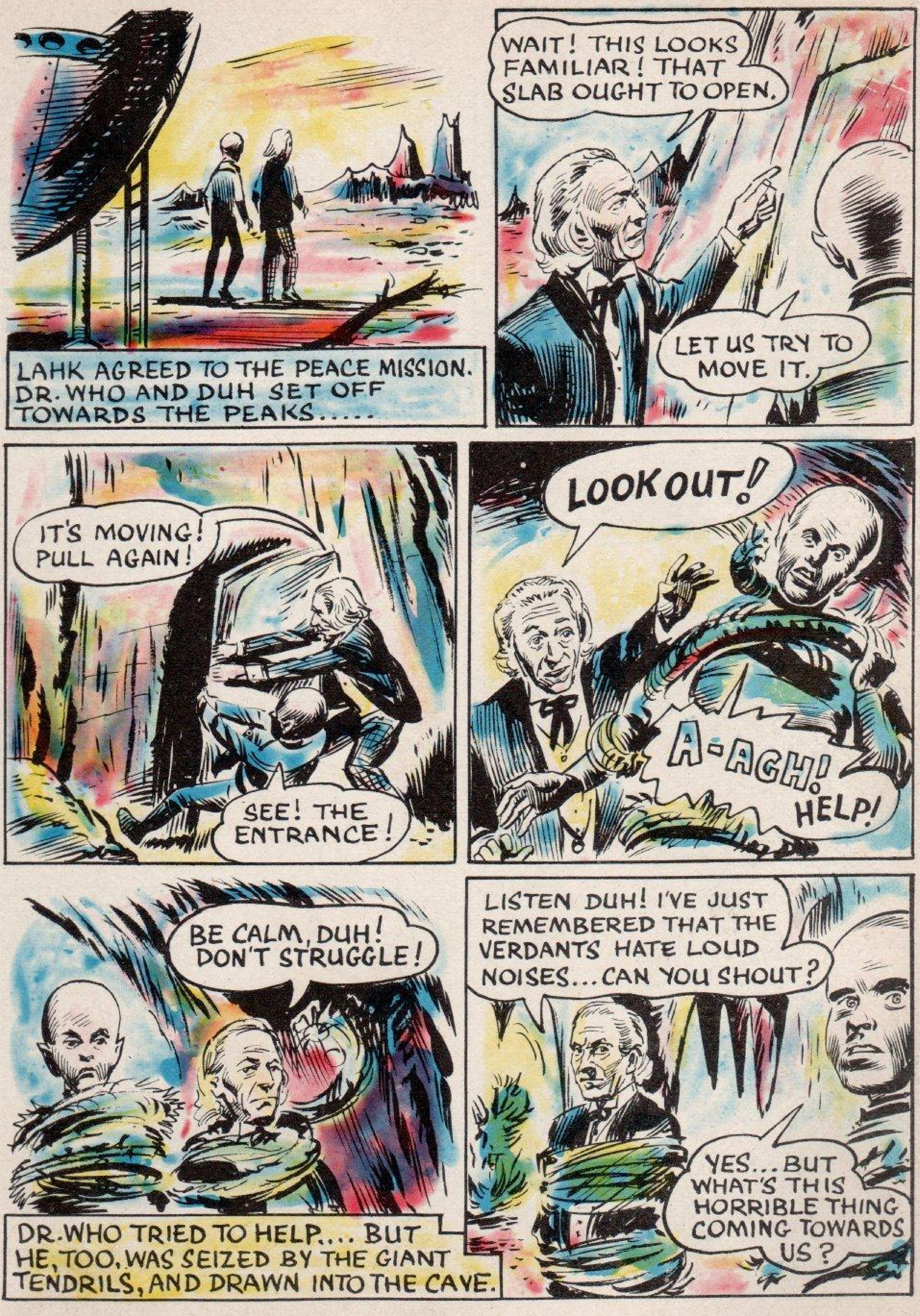

YOU EXPECT ME, LAHK, LEADER OF THE ROSTROWS, TO BELIEVE YOUR STORY, STRANGER?
I ASSURE YOU THAT IT IS QUITE TRUE.

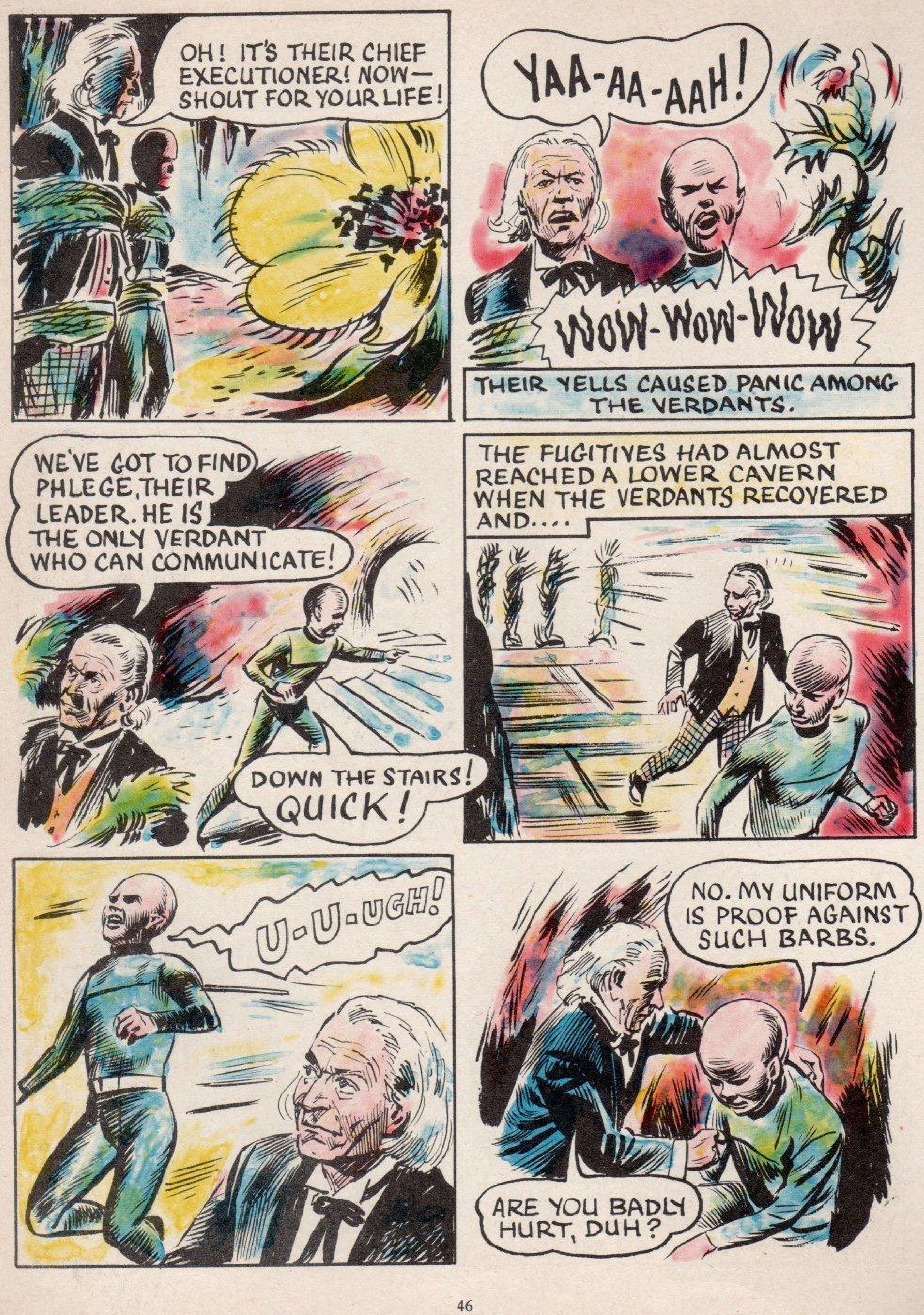

I CAN CERTAINLY TRY
THEN IF YOU KNOW SO MUCH TO BE ABLE TO TRAVEL THROUGH TIME AND SPACE, CAN YOU FIND THE FAULT IN OUR SHIP?

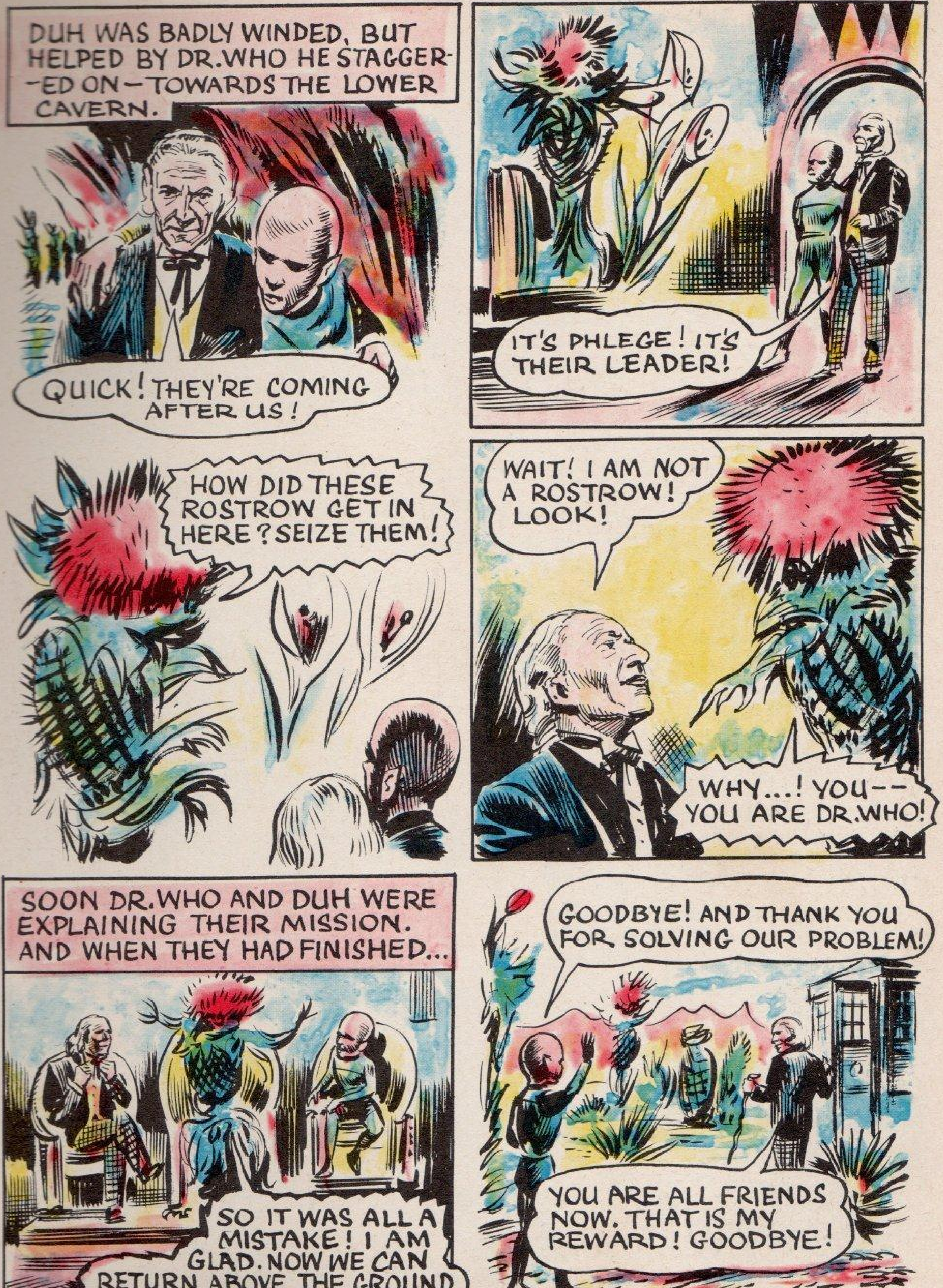

DUH WILL TAKE YOU TO THE ENERGY COMPARTMENT.


AS DUH LED HIM THROUGH THE SPACE SHIP, DR. WHO STOPPED IN AMAZEMENT. WITHIN GLASS-WALLED TANKS WRITHED GREEN TENDRILS... HE RECOGNISED THEM AT ONCE.
GOOD GRACIOUS! YOU'VE TAKEN SOME OF THE VERDANTS PRISONER!


WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? WHO ARE THE VERDANTS? THESE ARE PLANT SPECIMENS TO TAKE BACK TO OUR OWN PLANET.
DR. WHO TOLD DUH OF THE STRANGE PLANT CREATURES WHO INHABITED THE PLANET...
WHERE DID THE REST OF THE VERDANTS GO?
WHEN WE LANDED HERE, IT WAS A GREEN PLANET. WE COLLECTED THESE SPECIMENS. THE NEXT DAY THE PLANET WAS BARREN.
AH! THEY HAVE WITHDRAWN BELOW THE GROUND. THEY THINK YOU ARE HOSTILE.
THEN THAT IS WHY WE ARE UNABLE TO LEAVE?
YES. YOU ARE TRAPPED WITHIN THEIR FORCE-FIELD ....YOUR ONLY HOPE IS TO MAKE PEACE.
CAN YOU TAKE ME TO THEIR LEADER?
IF I CAN REMEMBER THE WAY. IT'S WORTH A TRY.


LAHK AGREED TO THE PEACE MISSION. DR. WHO AND DUH SET OFF TOWARDS THE PEAKS.....
WAIT! THIS LOOKS FAMILIAR! THAT SLAB OUGHT TO OPEN.
LET US TRY TO MOVE IT.
IT'S MOVING! PULL AGAIN!
SEE! THE ENTRANCE!
LOOKOUT!
A-AGH! HELP!
BE CALM, DUH! DON'T STRUGGLE!
DR. WHO TRIED TO HELP... BUT HE, TOO, WAS SEIZED BY THE GIANT TENDRILS, AND DRAWN INTO THE CAVE.
LISTEN DUH! I'VE JUST REMEMBERED THAT THE VERDANTS HATE LOUD NOISES... CAN YOU SHOUT?
YES... BUT WHAT'S THIS HORRIBLE THING COMING TOWARDS US?


OH! IT'S THEIR CHIEF EXECUTIONER! NOW— SHOUT FOR YOUR LIFE!
YAA-AA-AAH!
WOW-WOW-WOW
THEIR YELLS CAUSED PANIC AMONG THE VERDANTS.
WE'VE GOT TO FIND PHLEGE, THEIR LEADER. HE IS THE ONLY VERDANT WHO CAN COMMUNICATE!
DOWN THE STAIRS! QUICK!
THE FUGITIVES HAD ALMOST REACHED A LOWER CAVERN WHEN THE VERDANTS RECOVERED AND....
U-U-UGH!
NO. MY UNIFORM IS PROOF AGAINST SUCH BARBS.
ARE YOU BADLY HURT, DUH?


DUH WAS BADLY WINDED, BUT HELPED BY DR. WHO HE STAGGERED ON—TOWARDS THE LOWER CAVERN.
QUICK! THEY'RE COMING AFTER US!
IT'S PHLEGE! IT'S THEIR LEADER!
HOW DID THESE ROSTROW GET IN HERE? SEIZE THEM!
WAIT! I AM NOT A ROSTROW! LOOK!
WHY...! YOU-- YOU ARE DR. WHO!
SOON DR. WHO AND DUH WERE EXPLAINING THEIR MISSION. AND WHEN THEY HAD FINISHED...
SO IT WAS ALL A MISTAKE! I AM GLAD. NOW WE CAN RETURN ABOVE THE GROUND
GOODBYE! AND THANK YOU FOR SOLVING OUR PROBLEM!
YOU ARE ALL FRIENDS NOW. THAT IS MY REWARD! GOODBYE!

THE DEVIL-BIR OF CORBO

ONE moment the grotesque landscape was empty—devoid of life in the iron grip of a sub-zero dawn. The next moment *Tardis*, still in the shape of a police telephone box, had materialised.

It stood on one of the islands which rose out of the mist-wreathed waters of a foetid swamp. The surface of the island was pitted and uneven and *Tardis* had come to rest leaning at an angle, which gave it a slightly tipsy appearance.

Inside *Tardis*, Dr Who clambered stiffly back across the sloping floor to the six-sided control panel. The sudden lurch which the space-ship had given as it slid through the trans-dimensional flux and fitted its rearranged atoms into the new sphere, had flung him into one corner of the glistening interior.

It was no easy task to regain the controls. The outside dimensions of *Tardis* gave no hint of its immense size within. What looked like a police telephone box, big enough to hold two or at the most three standing people, contained, in fact, a room about twenty feet in height and with the breadth and width of a restaurant.

With a final grunt Dr Who hauled himself upright. For a moment he stood there panting

as he clung to the control panel. He smoothed back his fine mane of silver hair and straightened his cravat, which was fastened with a plain pearl tie-pin.

Then surging through him came the tingling excitement which he always experienced before opening the door to some new and awesome adventure.

Each of the six working tops of the control panel was covered with different-coloured handles and switches, dials and buttons. In the centre of this panel was a round column of glass from which came a pulsating glow. Dr Who's long, sensitive hands darted from switch to lever to button, pressing some and turning off others. The whining sound that had filled *Tardis* began to die away.

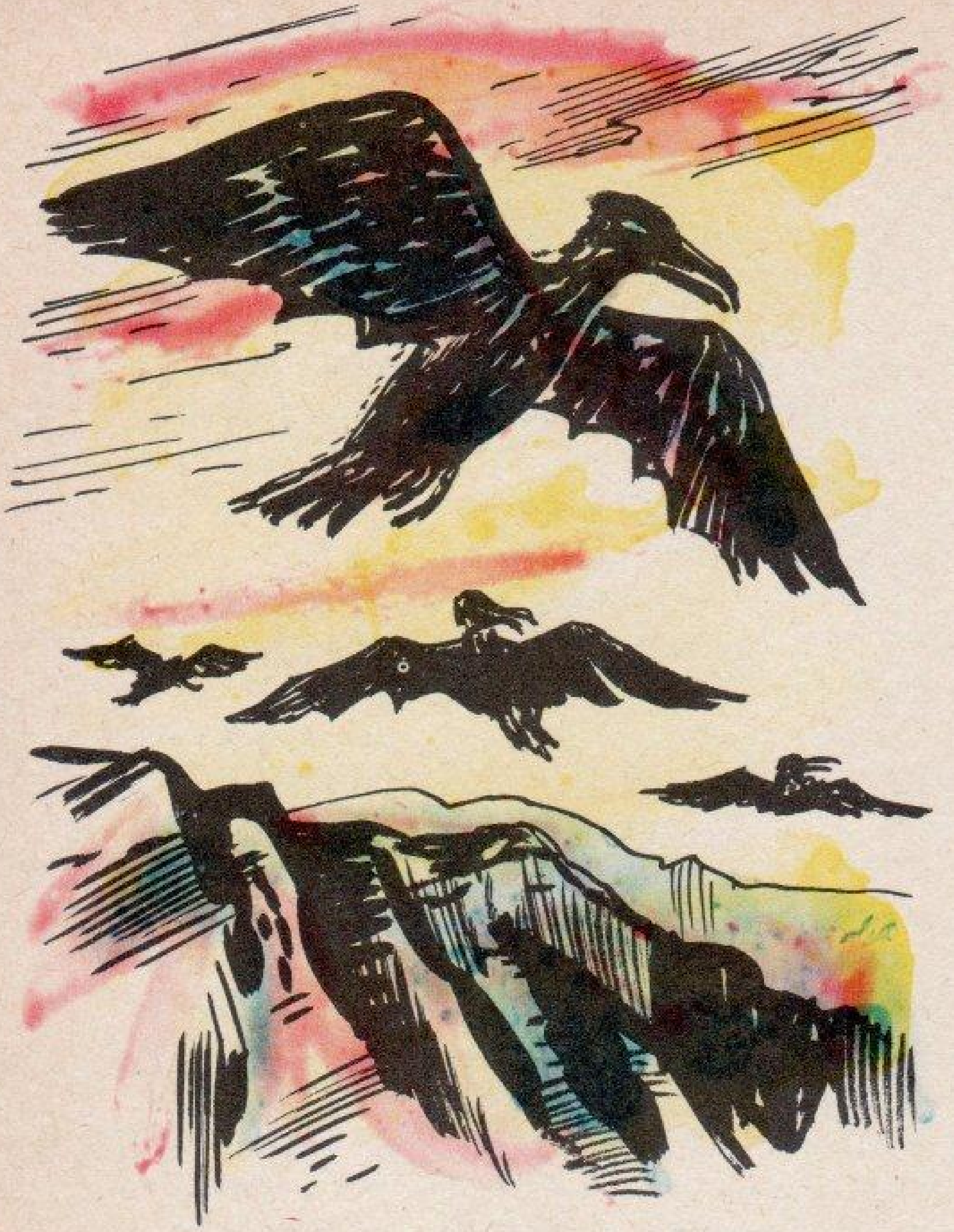
Dr Who chuckled and rubbed his hands in child-like anticipation: "Now then! Let us find out where we are—and whether my calculations have been correct! Shall we? Eh? Hm?"

The habit of talking to himself was one which gave the doctor a certain amount of comfort, dispelling the awesome feeling of complete isolation he sometimes experienced on his lone trips across the barriers of the fourth and fifth dimensions: Time and Space. He leant on the control panel and looked up eagerly at the scanner screen.

He was looking across a swamp, but ragged banners of mist made it difficult to see clearly. He touched a switch, and the picture altered to show the grotesque landscape beyond the black waters. It was barren and inhospitable—a highly irregular plain from which rose great masses of rock. Here and there yawned gaping holes, that were almost like craters from a bombardment. Indeed the comparison to a battlefield was one that sprang into Dr Who's mind as he gazed intently at the picture on his scanner screen.

His hand moved to the control switch. "But what lies beyond the plain?" he murmured. "Surely there must be mountains! The whole geology of this kind of terrain suggests mountains! Shall we take a closer look? Eh? Hm?"

The picture that flashed on the screen confirmed his belief—except that the mountains were more like huge cliffs. The entire landscape was ringed with them. But it was a rampart of rock the like of which he had never seen before in all his travels in *Tardis*.



The cliffs were tremendous in size. They were grim and hostile, with beetling overhangs that jutted razor-sharp edges over sheer plunging walls, footed by treacherous scree-slopes.

"Amazing! Simply amazing!" whispered Dr Who. He leaned on the control panel, and his hand trembled with excitement as he stared at the screen. The first blinding rays of an instant-dawn had obliterated every vestige of mist. Suddenly the cliffs seemed to blaze with light. Of what kind of rock they were composed he could only guess. . . .

"A compound of igneous rocks," he murmured aloud. "A gneiss, perhaps—except that I have never seen gneisses with such coarse crystals. They must be huge!"

It was a fantastic sight. In the fierce rays of morning light the cliffs constantly changed colour, passing through a wildly-jumbled spectrum.

All this held wonder and excitement for Dr Who. But what he spotted next, as he raised his eyes to the tops of the cliffs, added a chill tremor of fear to his feelings.

"Birds!" he exclaimed, taking a step back. "But—but—they must be twice as big as *Tardis*!"

It was a fairly accurate estimate. For the birds that flapped about the cliff-face with heavy wings looked as though they could pluck the largest space-craft from the sky with their huge talons.

Dr Who found that he had been holding his breath as he watched. Now he let it out in a long, shuddering sigh.

"Dear me!" he murmured, fingering the large ring which he wore on his right hand. "This does not seem to be the planet I intended to visit. . . . Well, well! Never mind!"

The thought of turning his back on this grim, and apparently hostile planet never entered his mind. According to the setting of his instruments, *Tardis* had materialised in a galaxy far beyond the Milky Way. But into what period of time he had intruded could only be determined by exploration, and Dr Who was never deterred by any fear, even fear of the unknown.

He took the usual precaution of sampling the atmosphere outside, and making other routine, remote-control tests. The instruments assured him that it was safe to venture outside.

"Hm! But since I seem to be on an island, I had better be prepared for a little sea voyage, eh?" he chuckled.

Holding on to the guard-rail he made a slitherly trip to his store-room. He returned with a plastic container in his hand, about the size of a shopping-bag. It was a deflatable cushion-craft of his own invention.

He pulled a black switch and the great doors of *Tardis* swung open. Dr Who picked up his walking-stick, an elegant cane with an ivory handle; exactly the sort that a dignified gentleman of Victorian tastes would take pride in. But to Dr Who it was not a mere ornament—it might prove useful if, perchance, he was attacked.

He stood outside *Tardis* and the sharp air made him shiver. For a moment he was tempted to go back inside for an Atmospheric Density Jacket, but a glance upwards showed him that the planet had twin suns, both of which were rising in different arcs at astonishing speed. Already the deadly zeroid grip of night was relaxing under the strident rays.

Locking the door behind him with his electronic key, Dr Who moved away from his space-ship to explore his immediate surroundings.

A glance was enough to show that he was the sole occupant of an island in the swamp on which *Tardis* had materialised.

His shoes crunched noisily as he walked. He stopped to look down. He had imagined the hard white surface of the island to be some form of rock-crust, argillaceous limestone or cretaceous sediment. But as he stooped for a closer look, he felt the hairs on the back of his neck grow stiff with horror. He was standing on an island of bleached bones. . . .

When he recovered from the first shock he picked up one of the bones. It appeared to be a vertebrae. From its size it could well have been part of a human skeleton.

Were these, then, the remains of the victims of those giant birds he had seen from the ship? The thought made him drop the bone as if it was red-hot. He strode on hurriedly to the water's edge. Something round rolled away as his foot kicked against it. He was on the point of picking it up when he drew back his hand sharply. The object was a skull!

Dr Who was not sorry to leave the grisly island. His cushion-craft, powered by a minute cosmic-energy unit, skimmed across the swamp. He could see that the turgid black wake left behind by the downward shafts of air was not ordinary water. Otherwise the swamp would have been a solid sheet of ice in the sub-zero temperature of that planet's night.

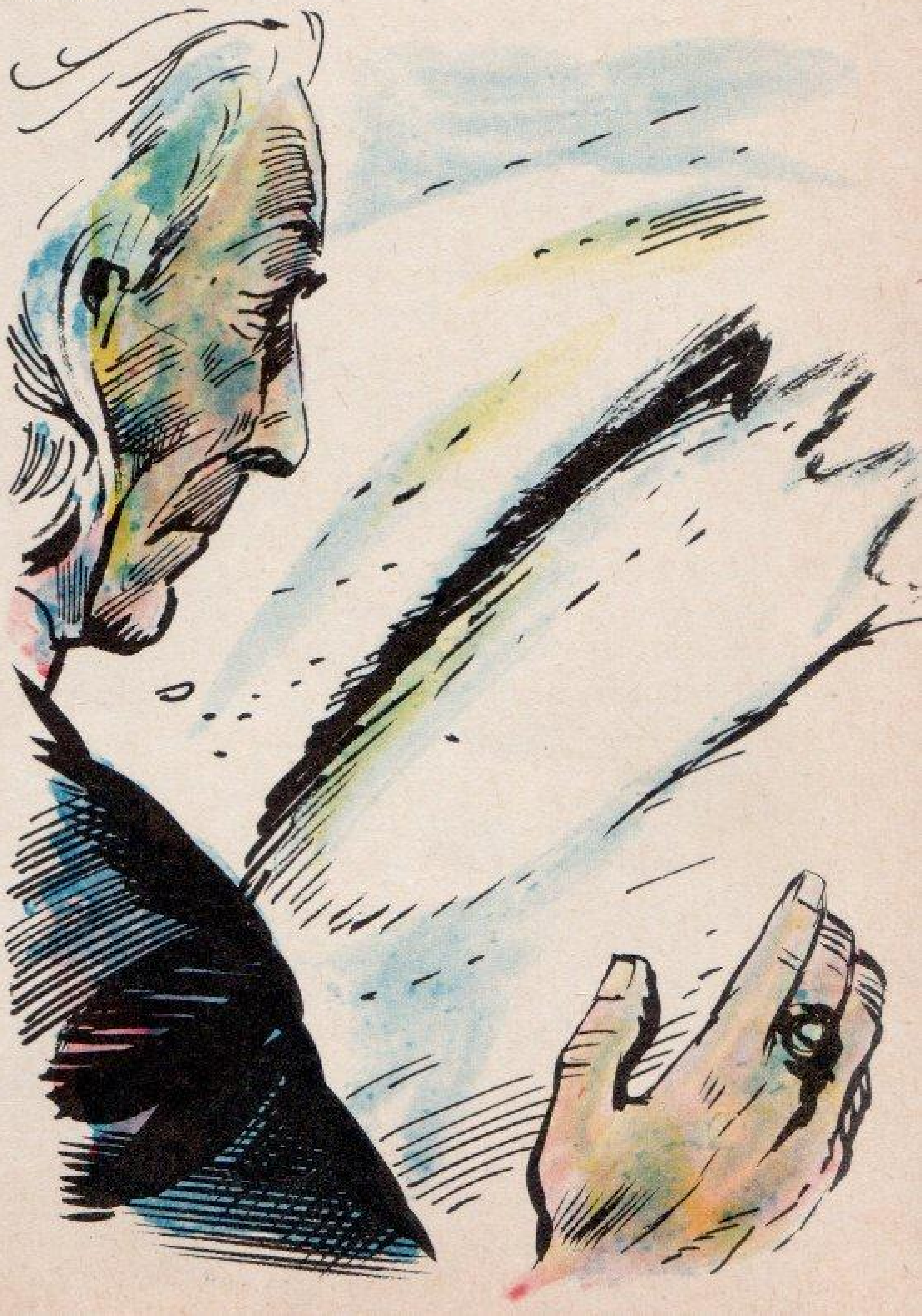
Leaving the craft on the sandy shore beyond he began to walk towards the towering cliffs. He kept a constant look-out for the giant birds, his keen blue eyes roving the rock-face. Now he could see that there were great clefts in the rock: deep, dark fissures in which the birds no doubt nested. But of the winged menaces themselves there was no sign. It occurred to Dr Who that this might indicate that they were night birds. But he knew he could take no chances.

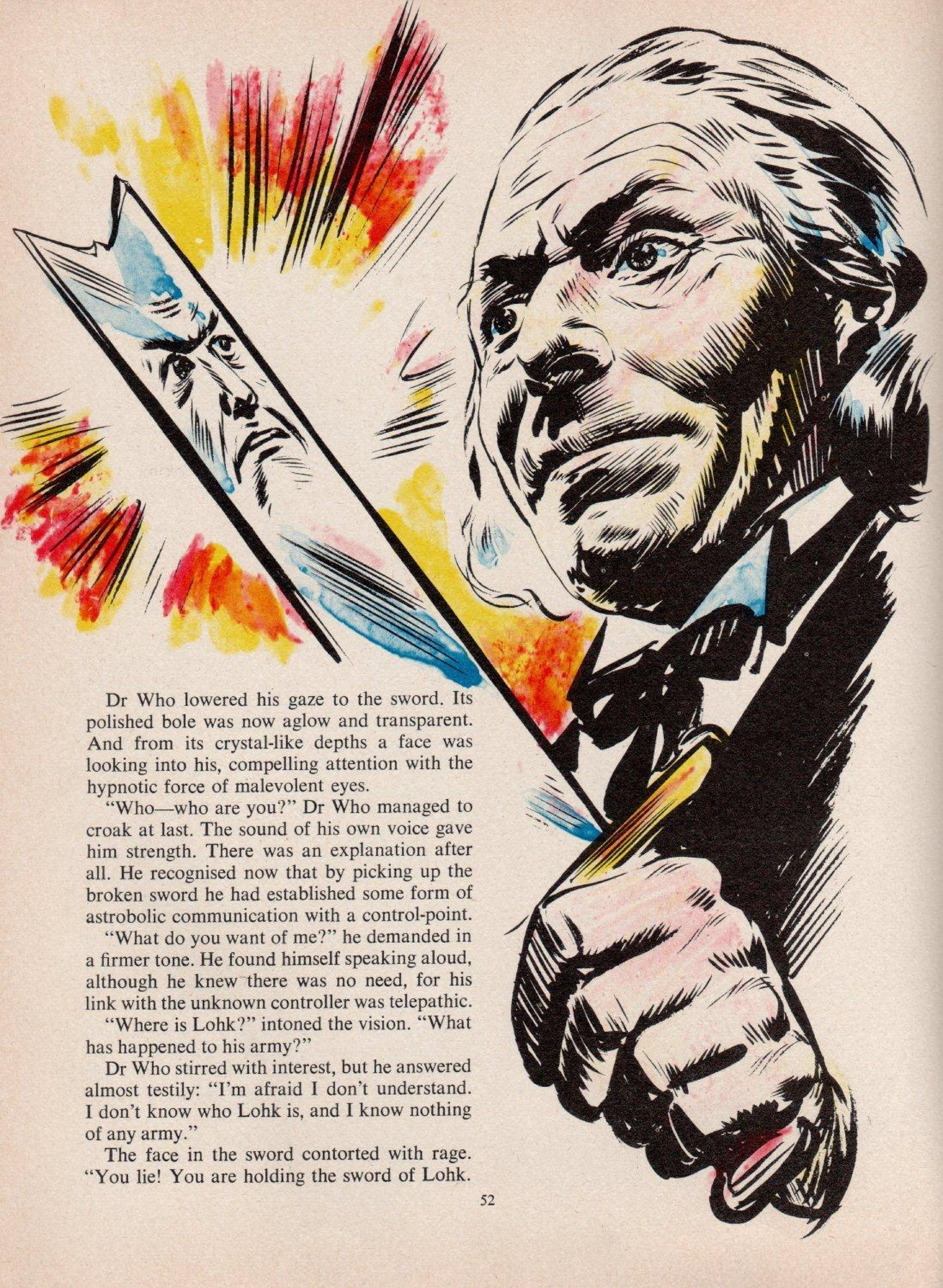
His foot struck something metallic. The sudden clang made him halt. He stood, with walking-stick raised and heart thumping. Bending down, he found he had dislodged a gleaming round object which had been buried in the sand. He was about to pick it up when he saw the footprint. . . .

For a few moments his imagination boggled at the size of the creature which must have left that print. In length the outline measured little less than six feet, and its breadth narrowed from four feet to two. Despite its size, the print reminded Dr Who of a human foot. But, moving forward, he saw that whatever monster had walked there had been web-footed.

Fascinated by his find, he lost all interest in his surroundings. This was the kind of clue that his scientific master-mind delighted in. Having absorbed every detail of the footprint, he next turned his attention to the metal object. His amazement knew no bounds when he found that it was the handle of a huge sword. Part of the broken blade was still attached to it. He bent to pick it up and, as he did so, his well-developed sense of danger—which had served him so well in many a peril—cried a warning in his brain. But his hand was already on the sword-handle. It was too late now for withdrawal.

There was a crackling noise and his brain spun dizzily. Some form of power surged from the sword through his hands and into his body. He was transfixed. Something was happening inside his mind. He could hear a thin, high voice, cold and rasping, which commanded with a fierce insistence: "Look at me! Look at the sword!"





Dr Who lowered his gaze to the sword. Its polished bole was now aglow and transparent. And from its crystal-like depths a face was looking into his, compelling attention with the hypnotic force of malevolent eyes.

"Who—who are you?" Dr Who managed to croak at last. The sound of his own voice gave him strength. There was an explanation after all. He recognised now that by picking up the broken sword he had established some form of astrobolic communication with a control-point.

"What do you want of me?" he demanded in a firmer tone. He found himself speaking aloud, although he knew there was no need, for his link with the unknown controller was telepathic.

"Where is Lohk?" intoned the vision. "What has happened to his army?"

Dr Who stirred with interest, but he answered almost testily: "I'm afraid I don't understand. I don't know who Lohk is, and I know nothing of any army."

The face in the sword contorted with rage. "You lie! You are holding the sword of Lohk.

You must be Ulla, who controls the devil birds. Admit it!"

"Certainly not!" snapped Dr Who. It was not bravado that prompted him; he had taken an intense dislike to the green-hued face before him. "My dear sir, I am certainly not Ulla—whoever he might be. As for the sword, I found it in the sand just now—broken. I gather that your Lohk—and perhaps the army you speak of, may have fallen foul of those huge birds-of-prey that infest the cliffs. You see, my friend, the islands that rise in the swamp are made of—bones!"

The eyes in the sword-handle dilated with rage. "You lie!" The voice sliced into Dr Who's brain. "You shall pay for this!"

The face vanished.

Dr Who flung down the sword-shaft. He had turned away to resume his exploration when a shadow above him cut off the light of the twin suns. He crouched low, aware in a flash what had happened. While his attention had been riveted on the sword, one of the giant birds had spotted him and was swooping on him from the cliffs!

He saw the enormous, barrel-like body of the bird. He saw the great black wings folding upwards for the death-dealing plunge. He saw the wicked talons spread like the steel grabs of a crane.

The rush of air below the plunging bird prompted Dr Who's paralysed senses to action. With a wild, despairing effort he flung himself to one side. He hit the ground and rolled over and over. Then suddenly the ground opened under him, and he went plunging and bouncing like a boulder down a slope. He fetched up against a wall of rock, with a shock that knocked the breath from his body.

As he lay there, sprawled out and gasping, the fierce light of the twin suns above him was again obscured. The devil-bird was about to strike again. . . .

Helplessly he watched it hover like a hawk on almost motionless wings. Fierce eyes above a razor beak glared down. And then the wings folded and the bird dropped like a stone . . . down, down, down, towards the helpless scientist.

Of what happened next Dr Who had very little recollection later. He heard voices shouting, young voices. He felt his jacket tighten under his arms and his cravat almost torn from his neck. The next thing he knew—it could only have been a split second later—he was lying in the shadow of an overhanging rock with two figures huddled in next to him.

A fountain of earth rose in the air as the bird hit the ground in the place where Dr Who had been lying a moment before. He had a spine-chilling glimpse of the mountain of black feathers; he saw the wild eyes searching for its prey; he heard the wicked snap of the great beak. . . .

A few minutes passed, minutes of grey obscurity during which unconsciousness pulled a merciful blanket across his overwrought mind.

When he opened his eyes again he immediately doubted what he saw. For two faces looked down into his; smooth and round faces, their dead-white complexion looking even whiter against the contrast of fiery mops of red hair.

Dr Who closed his eyes; then he opened them again quickly. The apparitions were still there. He struggled up on to one elbow.

"Why—you're children! Earth children!" he exclaimed incredulously.

The girl smiled. She had dark serious eyes, but there were tell-tale red rings around them that told of tears recently shed. "Are you all right?" she asked.

"Indeed yes, my child," said the doctor, sitting up. He began to adjust his crumpled cravat, nodding benignly from girl to boy as he did so. "It seems that I owe you my thanks for saving me from that fearsome bird," he went on.

"It was a close thing, wasn't it, Dot?" said the boy. "I think the oojah has flown off home now, though. Hang on, I'll go and check."

He crawled towards the edge of the rock under which they were sheltering. "Be careful, Jack!" the girl called after him.

The boy came back to them, shrugging his shoulders nonchalantly. "Not a sign," he declared.

Dr Who looked from one to the other. "Am I correct in supposing that you are brother and sister?" he enquired.

"Twins!" declared Jack. "But not identical," he added with a grin.

Dr Who saw a tear stealing down the girl's white cheeks. "Oh, please don't cry, my dear," he begged anxiously.

She brushed away the tear, and spoke in a small, choked voice. "I was just thinking that we're probably orphans as well," she said.

"Buck up, Dot!" comforted her brother, putting an arm round her. "We don't know for sure that Dad and the others are dead."

"But what chance had they against those—those dreadful, awful——" She broke off, hiding her red head on Jack's shoulder and weeping silently.

Dr Who picked up his silver-topped stick and laid it across his knee. "I think you had better tell me the whole story, my boy."

So Jack told the story. He spoke crisply and to the point, as befitted the son of top British space scientist Harroll Strong.

It was a story that went back to the decision of the Council of Earth and Mars to send out an inter-galactic mission. Strong had been put in charge of the advance party. His decision to take his two children along with him had not been made without a great deal of deliberation. He had long felt it would prove extremely important to study the reactions of the new generation to the new planets they would one day be required to explore, and perhaps colonise. And Strong had been prompted to take his own children because he was a widower, their mother having died when the twins were still babies.

The advance party had landed upon the planet Corbo with high hopes of finding great mineral wealth. Advance robot-rockets had landed there and flashed back news that the great rainbow cliffs were one vast mass of rare crystalline deposits, as Dr Who had surmised.

But the explorers from Earth–Mars were soon to find they had touched down in the middle of a nightmare.

As soon as their ship landed it had been surrounded by a strange magnetic field which completely immobilised both reactors and instruments. Strong had decided to split his party into two groups: one to collect and bring back mineral specimens as planned, and the other to trace the source of the magnetic control with instruments. The children had gone with the first group; while their father had headed the more dangerous mission.

For the children the exploration had been an episode of complete disaster. Their party had arrived in the region of the swamp to witness a terrible battle in progress. An army of green-skinned creatures, led by a giant with webbed feet, had tried to beat off with their swords the hordes of devil-birds which descended upon them from the heights. Their weapons had been less than useless. Those who stood their ground were crushed by the terrible talons and borne away: the giant leader being the first to perish.

Then the giant birds—"Oh, there were millions of them!" interrupted Dot, her dark eyes wide at the memory—had spotted the explorers. Too late the party tried to escape. Their Commander had hustled them down into the crater in which Dr Who and the children were now sitting.

Dot and Jack had been thrust for safety under the rock, while the rest of the men formed a semicircle and fought the devil-birds with ray guns, disintegrator missiles and deadly heat cannons.

All had been in vain. The birds had snatched every single one of the defenders and vanished, leaving the trembling children clinging to each other in horror beneath the rock.

As Jack finished his grim tale, Dr Who stretched out his hands and squeezed theirs. "A dreadful experience," he murmured. "Dear me, yes." His eyes grew thoughtful as his skilled brain pieced the jig-saw of events together. "It would appear that the creatures you saw fighting the birds were invaders from another planet. . . . Yes, yes. That must be it! And the face in the sword would be that of their controller in a space-ship. . . . Possibly there are more invaders waiting to see how their companions fared."

The children glanced at each other in bewilderment. "What face?" queried Dot.

"What sword?" echoed Jack.

Curbing his impatience, Dr Who quickly related his experience with the broken sword. "But I am sure it was no ordinary sword," he added. "It was some form of nuclear weapon."

"And yet it couldn't stop the birds," said Jack. "Why can't they be killed? And who is Ulla? And how does he control the birds? And why can't——"

Dr Who held up a protesting hand. "My dear boy! One question at a time. But we can't find the answers by sitting here."

He rose to his feet cautiously. "Well, there's no sign of our feathered friends at the moment," he said, carefully dusting his frock-coat. "Pass me my walking-stick and let us take a closer look at the cliff."

It was an odd procession which hurried across the barren scree-slopes towards the cliffs. Dr Who led the way, his eyes scanning the heights for signs of attack. Behind him came the twins, hampered a little by their space-suits. Jack took his sister's hand to pull her along faster.

They reached the foot of the cliffs, and now Dr Who could see they were exactly as he had surmised; exactly what the Earth–Mars mission had hoped for: a mass of solid mineral wealth. . . . Little wonder that Ulla—whoever he was—needed invincible guardians, for this treasure would incite the greed of any invader.

Absorbed in this scientific phenomena, Dr Who lifted his stick and poked at the rock-face.

The next moment Dot gave a cry: "Look! Look! It's opening!"

Soundlessly a section of the rock had slid back under the pressure of the doctor's stick. Beyond lay huge steps, carved in the rock and spiralling upwards into the darkness.

The children hung back as Dr Who stepped through the opening. He beckoned them impatiently. "Well, come along. Come along!" he urged. "This requires investigation."

They went upwards into inky blackness. Dot began to whimper with fear.

Dr Who paused. "Wait a moment," he said, fumbling in his pocket. "I have a pencil-torch here. . . . Now you come up close to me, little girl, and take hold of my coat-tail."

The steps seemed to go on for ever. Surely they must be near the top of the cliff now?

"Ah! I think. . . . Yes, here's a door!" whispered Dr Who at last.

They gathered round, panting from the climb. Cautiously Dr Who tried the door. It slid back on air-cushion tracks. The blue light that spilled from the opening made them stand blinking for a moment. . . .

Then they saw the birds. There were hundreds of them, possibly thousands. They stood, motionless and silent, in close-packed ranks like columns of soldiers, on the floor of a vast cavern.

The children drew back with gasps of horror, but Dr Who did not notice. He was busy estimating the size of these monstrous birds. As he did so, there came unbidden into his mind the memory of a legend he had heard during a visit to Earth, about just such a bird as this, which was said to have lived there once. It was called the Giant Roc, and it was supposed to have been so big that it fed elephants to its babies. . . .

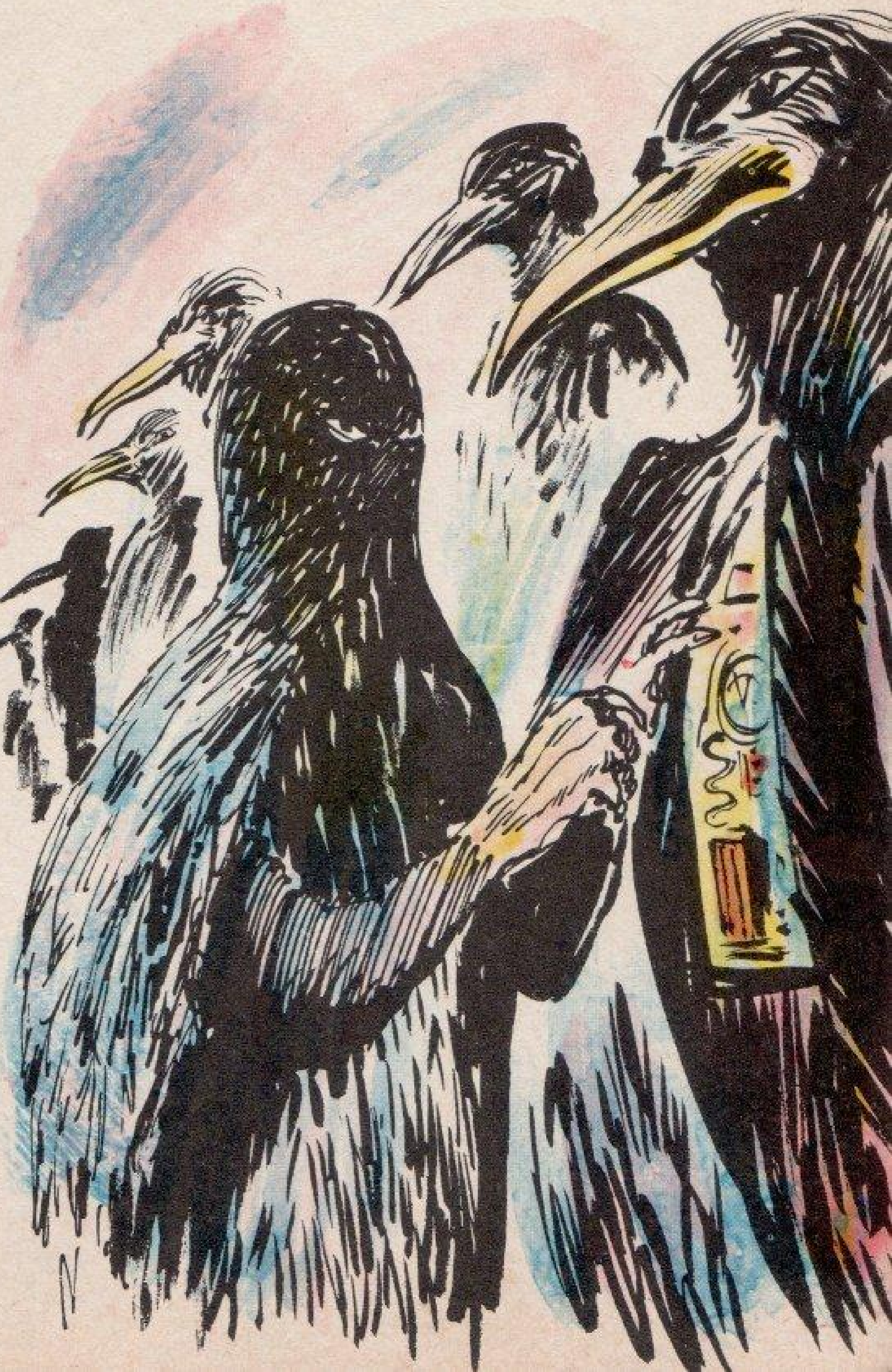
He was recalled from his daydream by Jack tugging at his sleeve. "Look, look!" he was hissing. "See what they're doing to the birds!"

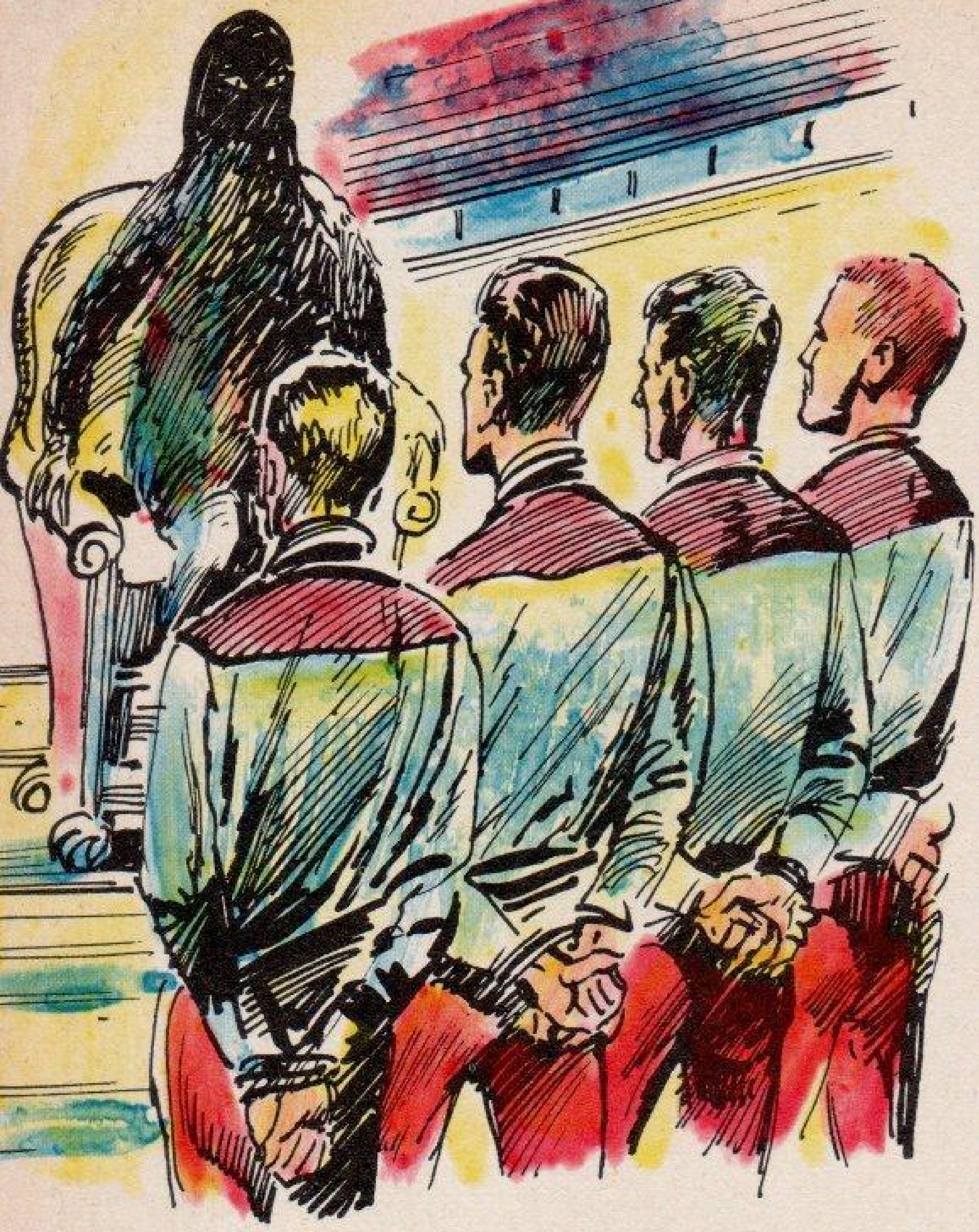
Dr Who caught his breath in astonishment as he looked in the direction at which the boy was pointing.

Waddling down the lines of birds were squat black beings with almost human heads. They were clad in suits of feathers; or was it their natural covering? But it was what they were engaged upon that made Dr Who marvel. With gun-shaped tools in their hands, they were lifting the plumage of the birds. As they did so, the weird blue light in the cavern glinted quite distinctly on metal entrails. . . .

The devil-birds were robots!

So staggering was the revelation that Dr Who failed to notice a new scene unfolding. It was a





trembling cry from Dot which brought him to his senses.

"Daddy!"

In the centre of the cavern an aperture had suddenly appeared. Out of it was rising a platform of sparkling crystal. Seated in the middle of an ornate throne was a thin huddle of black feathers. It was a creature exactly like the ones who were tending the robot-birds, and Dr Who knew in a flash that this must be Ulla.

The bird-king was glaring with spiteful eyes at four men who stood bound and guarded before his throne. The captives were tall men, but the tallest of them had the same mop of unruly red hair as the twins. It could be none other than Harroll Strong, their father.

Ulla was pointing a finger at the leader of the expedition. "See!" he croaked. "Look all around you and learn the secret of my great power. Look upon my devil-birds—and then die!"

At a signal, the guards thrust Strong roughly to his knees. Another of the bird-beings stepped forward. He was brandishing over his head a gleaming sword of the kind which Dr Who had found in the sand. Even as he recognised it as a captured weapon, the doctor realised what was about to happen. . . . Strong was to be beheaded!

Dr Who thrust the children behind him into the doorway. "Stay here, children!" he ordered.

Then he whirled round and walked towards the platform shouting: "Now wait a moment, please! Just one moment!"

There was a stunned silence. The weirdly assorted group, turning to stare at the intruder, were frozen into immobility. They gave the impression of actors staging some grotesque tableau. The executioner lowered the great sword so that the tip pointed straight at Dr Who. Completely unconcerned, he mounted the steps on to the platform.

For a few seconds he stood leaning on his stick, looking around with a rather tolerant, even amused expression. Finally his gaze rested on the menacing sword. Casually he straightened, throwing his head back in a characteristically arrogant manner.

"Tut tut, my friend!" he chided. "You should never point a weapon like that at anybody. It could be dangerous!"

Before the creature could move, Dr Who raised his stick and dealt the sword a ringing blow. It was little more than a tap, yet the effect was startling. The executioner went reeling back as if from a hammer-blow, and the sword flew from his grip and clattered to the ground at the feet of Ulla.

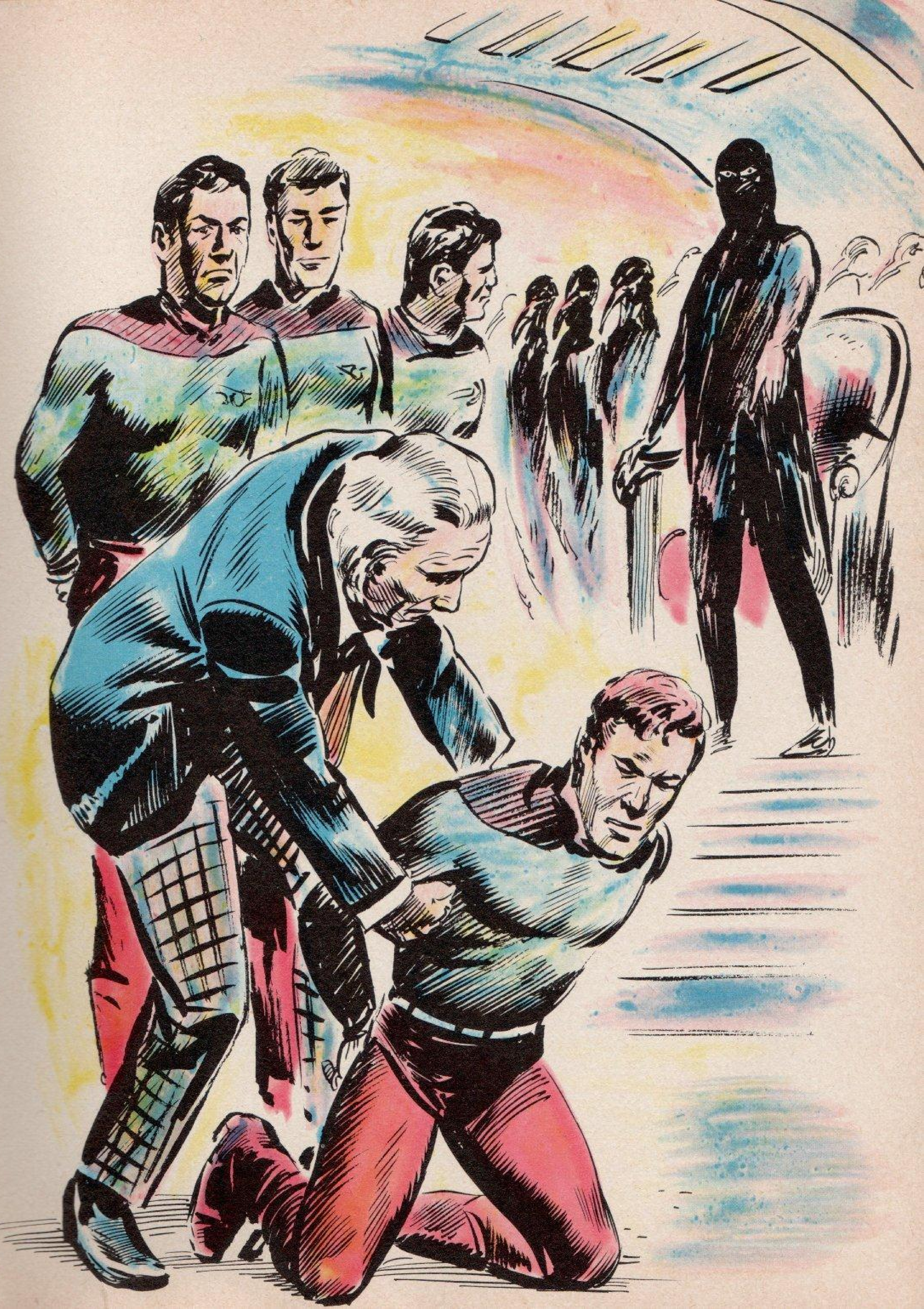
The bird-king rose from the throne, his feathers bristling with rage. "You shall die for that!" he screeched, pointing a trembling claw at the object of his fury.

Dr Who paid scant attention. He moved across to help the red-haired space explorer to his feet. The bird warriors stared at him, as if mesmerised.

"Dr Strong? I'm glad to see you are unharmed! Yes indeed!" murmured Dr Who as he raised the other from his knees.

Strong found the bonds falling from his wrists. He smiled his thanks to his rescuer: "Thanks a lot!" he whispered. "But watch out for trouble now. They're all armed!"

Dr Who looked round slowly. The muzzles of the ray guns surrounded him. The bright-beady eyes of the bird-king were fixed upon him with glittering intensity.



"You must be Ulla!" said Dr Who. "Could we talk things over without all these guns? Hm? Most annoying to have them pointing at one. . . . Most annoying!"

Ulla took a step towards him. "No!" he screeched. "There shall be no talk! You are a spy!"

"A spy?" exclaimed Dr Who. He stroked his long silvery hair, and allowed himself a wry smile. "Now really, Ulla! Who would I be spying for?"

"For the green invaders who came before!" stormed the bird-king. "You have come to find out what befell your army and their leader, Lohk! Well, they are all dead! Crushed by my birds! Dead—do you hear! See—here is one of their swords!"

Ulla snatched up the fallen sword and whirled it over his head so fast that it seemed to become a solid circle of steel.

Dr Who frowned. "I do wish you wouldn't do that!" he said. "I assure you that I am not a spy. I am a traveller in space and time, and I come here to the planet Corbo as a friend."

Ulla stopped whirling the sword, but he still kept it held poised over his head. Slowly he stepped towards Dr Who. "I do not believe you! They sent you in a different shape to try and trick me! But I—Ulla—am too clever for you! And now *you* shall be the first to die!"

Dr Who glimpsed the sword-blade descending in a silver arc to split him in two. Desperately he flung himself under the blade. As he hit the platform he thrust his stick between the other's feathered legs. Caught off-balance, Ulla went staggering forward. The sword flew from his grasp and his clutching talons fastened on two of the guards. The three went down together in a flurry of feathers.

At the same moment, Harroll Strong grabbed one of the others, picked him up bodily and flung him at the remaining guards, knocking them down as neatly as a row of ninepins.

Dr Who scrambled to his feet and ran to the three bound men. He commenced to free them.

Suddenly an electronic warning device began to intone a deep-voiced warning that filled the cavern with deafening echoes. . . . "Enemy attack! Mobilise! Mobilise! Attack!"

There was a scream of rage from Ulla. He had regained his feet, but he seemed now to have lost interest in his captives. Instead he spread his arms and suddenly rose into the air. Like a black arrow he darted to a control panel in a corner of the cavern. There he began frenziedly to operate switches. As he did so whole sections of the cavern walls slid aside to show light beyond. Immediately the columns of devil-birds began to move rapidly through the openings. Outside they spread their great wings and launched into space.

Ulla was so absorbed with marshalling his robot-birds for the attack that he failed to notice Dr Who leading the four explorers across the cavern to the doorway.

Harroll Strong paused there for a moment to embrace his children.

Dr Who was already leading the way down the spiral staircase. "Come along now!" he called over his shoulder. "No time to waste. We should be able to slip back to my ship while there's a battle going on. . . . Follow me!"

They emerged at the foot of the cliffs to witness a grim struggle raging over the barren slopes. As Dr Who had suspected, the green-skinned creatures had landed another force. But

this time, profiting by the fate of their comrades, they were equipped with weapons which were proving more effective against the birds. Already several of the feathered robots lay in scattered mounds on the battlefield.

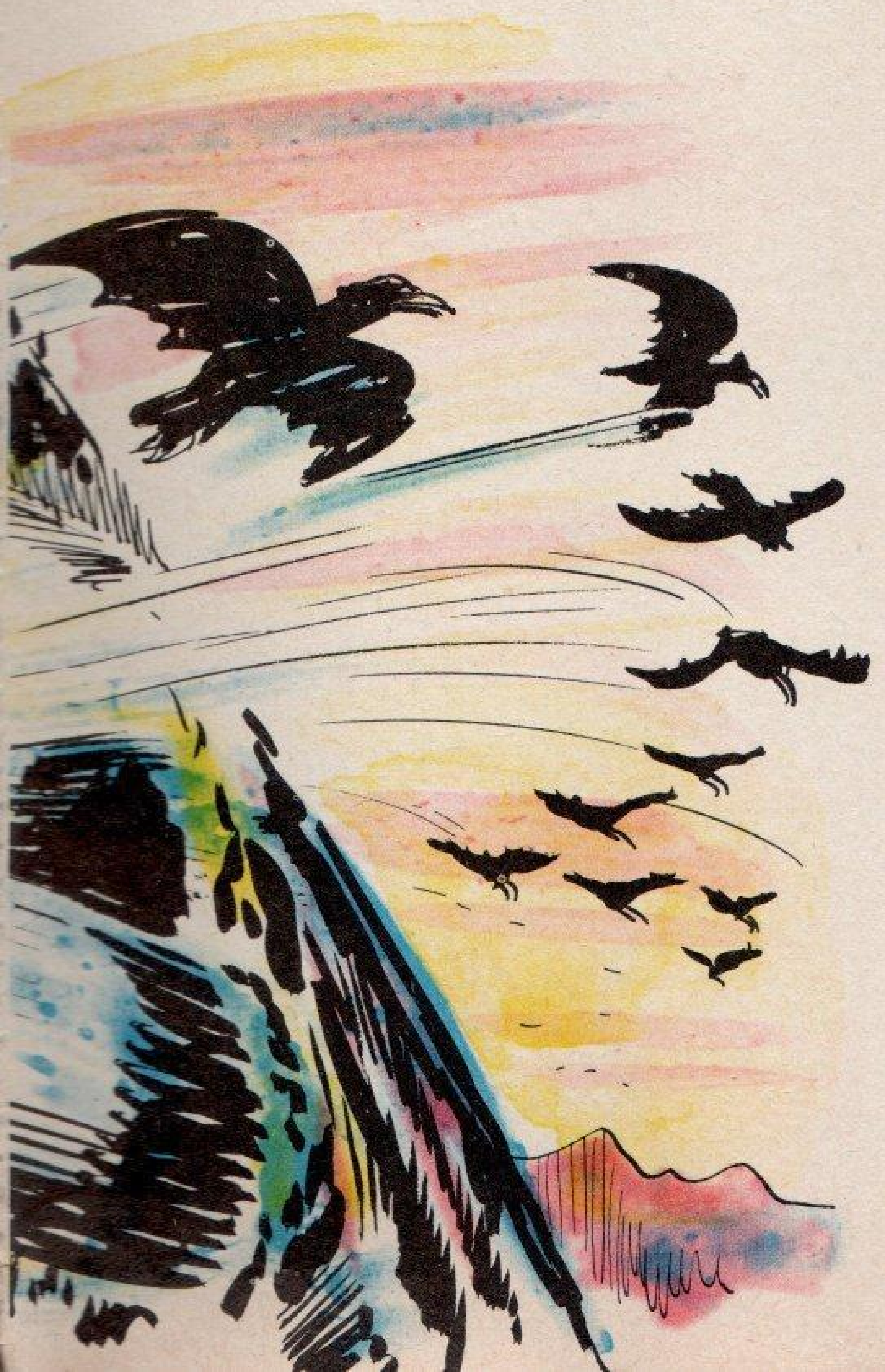
Dr Who turned to his companions. "You must follow me closely—and as fast as you can," he instructed. "There's not a moment to lose."

He chose a route that skirted the battleground at a safe distance. The others followed close. Strong had picked up his daughter and was carrying her easily on his back.

They reached the edge of the swamp. Somehow they all managed to cram themselves into the cushion-craft. A few seconds later they had reached the island of bones.

Dr Who began to hurry towards *Tardis*. But the others stopped, staring with dismay at the police telephone-box.

Dr Who turned and waved to them impatiently. "Good gracious me! This is no time to stand and stare! Come along! Into my ship!" he cried.



It was Strong who voiced the disbelief they all felt. "Are you serious? Do you call this a space-ship? Why, we can't all fit inside that box."

Dr Who spluttered with impatience. His eye had caught sight of a black form, which had detached itself from the flock of robot-birds and was swooping rapidly towards the island.

"Hurry! This is no time to argue! Inside—all of you!"

They obeyed him then and they preceded him into *Tardis*. And, as the last man passed through the great doors, Dr Who helped him to safety with a thrust. Then he whirled to meet the devil-bird. . . .

To his amazement he saw that it was Ulla. The evil genius was armed with a ray gun, from which he opened fire as he came screaming down from the brazen skies.

Dr Who flung himself swiftly to one side. And, as Ulla swooped close above, he slashed at the feathered body and felt his stick sink home with a resounding *thwack*!

Feeling very pleased with himself, Dr Who hurried through the doors of *Tardis*. His new friends flocked around him.

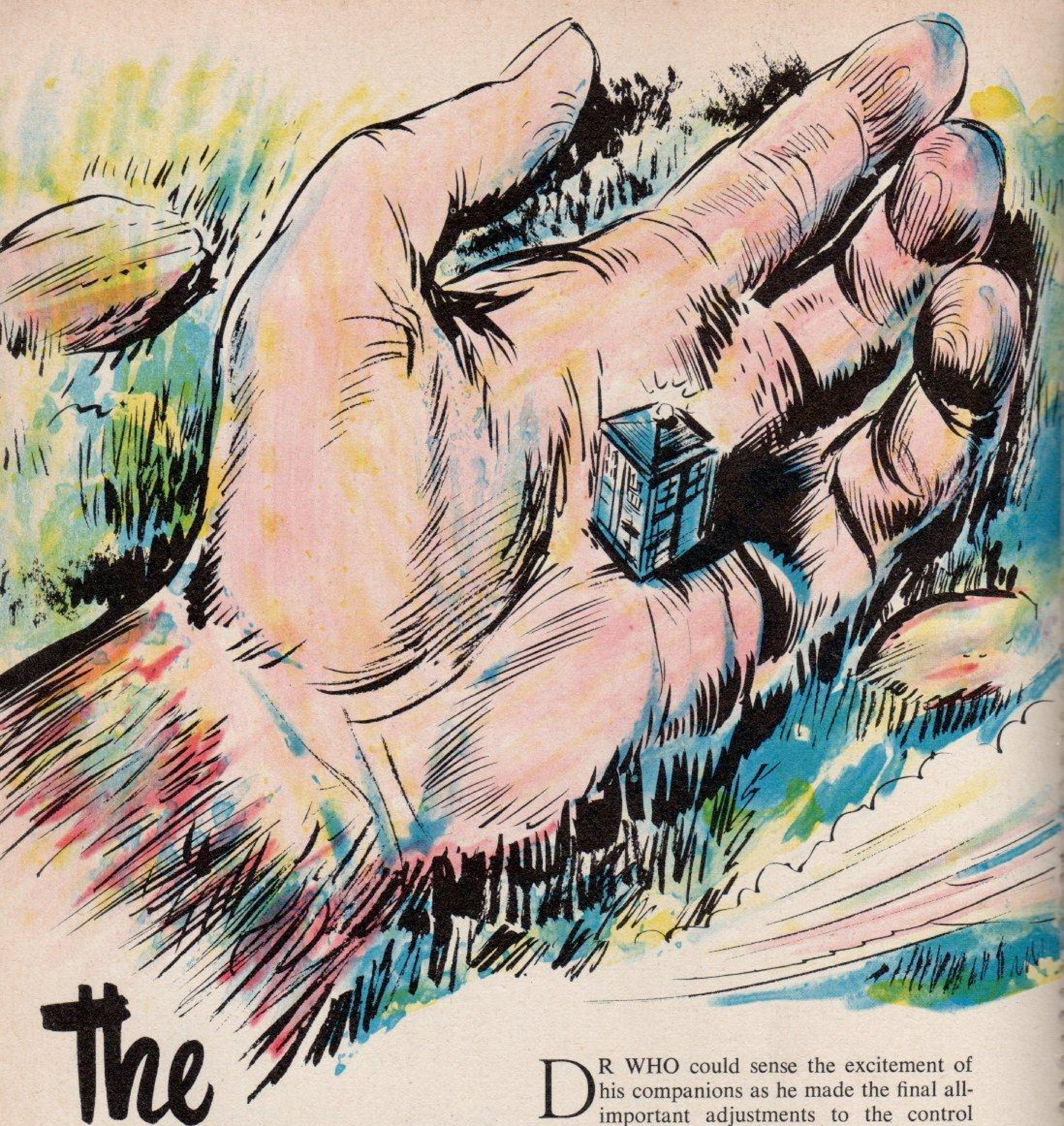
"Are you all right?" asked Dot anxiously.

"Yes, yes! Of course I'm all right!" said Dr Who, turning to slip his walking-stick back into its rack. "And I feel all the better for having given that bully of a bird-king a taste of my cane!"

As he moved towards the control panel and began to operate the levers that would take them far from the planet Corbo in space and time, Jack tugged at his frock-coat. "I say! You do look funny with a feather in your hair!" he grinned.

Dr Who lifted his hand and removed the feather which was lodged in his silvery mane of hair. It was a long black feather, and it glistened in the light of the myriad bulbs winking from the control panels.

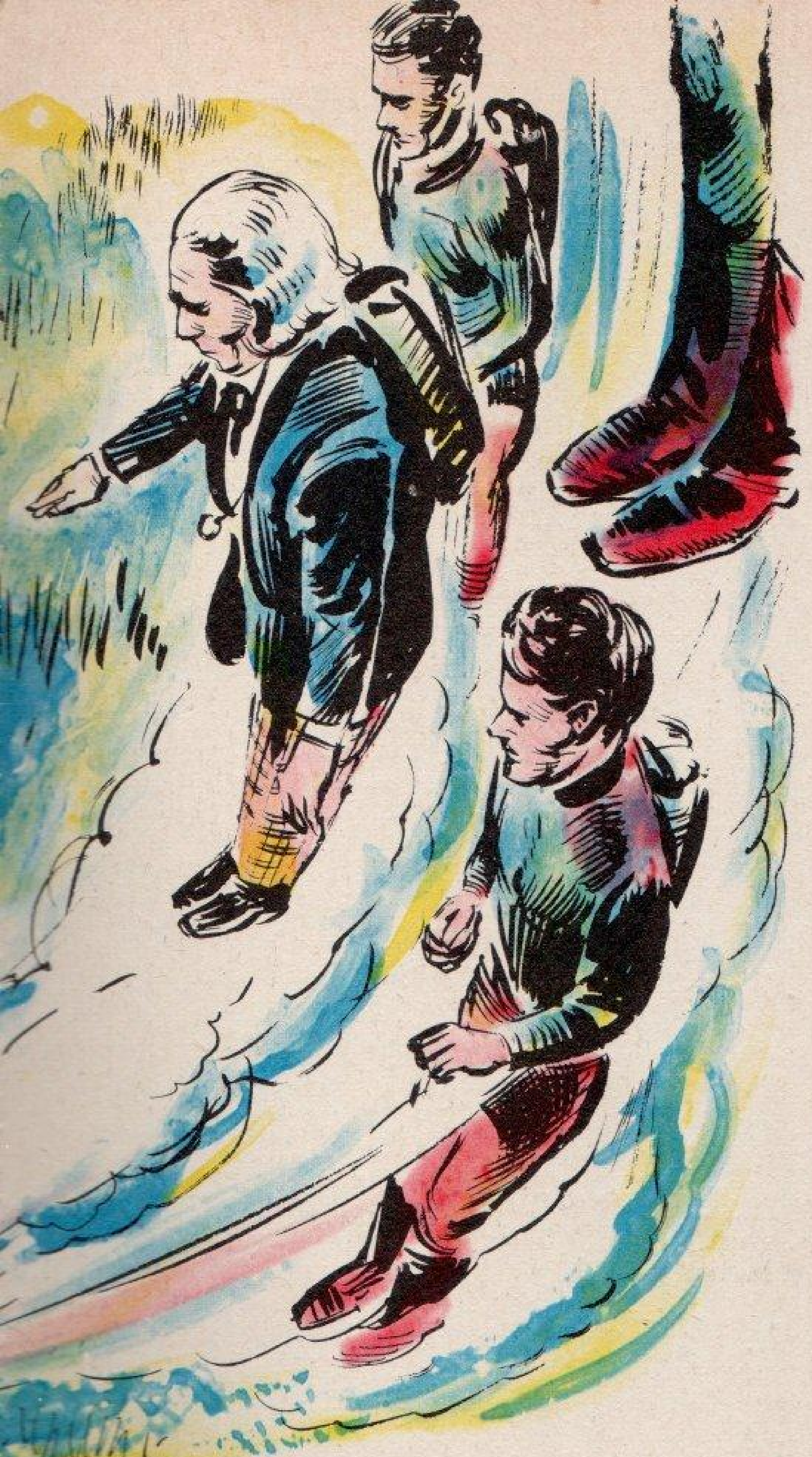
With a smile Dr Who handed the feather to Jack. "You will want to keep this as a memento of Ulla! I fancy it was loosened by the whack I gave him! And now"—he continued, busying himself with the controls again—"I must see what can be done about returning you all to your planet Earth. Hm?"



The PLAYTHINGS of FO

DR WHO could sense the excitement of his companions as he made the final all-important adjustments to the control panel of *Tardis*. Without realising it, they had inched closer and closer to the glittering expanse of dials and levers and winking lights, until now they were almost nudging the doctor's elbows.

He stirred a little impatiently. Although he was a master-mind, capable of spanning all spatial infinity and all temporal eternity with his incredible knowledge of science and mathematics, yet Dr Who was very human. Like any



absent-minded professor on Earth, he could be both temperamental and moody.

At this moment he was inclined to be irritated by the circle of anxious faces peering over his shoulders. Indeed he was on the point of asking them to move away and stop disturbing him when he caught sight of the strained expressions on the faces of the twins.

His impatience evaporated. He even forced a tired smile. "Well, my dear children, the moment has arrived. I am all ready to make my *Tardis* materialise again." He patted the girl's mop of fiery red hair.

"Doctor," she asked timidly, "will we—do you think—shall we be back on Earth?"

He shrugged. "Who can tell, my child? Who can tell?" he said. "As I told you before, our escape from Corbo was so abrupt that the vibration upset the space-time locator mechanism."

Harroll Strong, the space explorer, placed a powerful hand on Dot's shoulder and gave it a comforting squeeze, as he said: "Yes, we all understand, doctor. You have not been able to plot a definite course through . . . through——"

He hesitated, and Dr Who finished the sentence for him: "Through the multi-dimensions of space and time, my dear fellow. . . . No, no, I'm afraid there is nothing definite as to where we shall find ourselves. I have done the best I can under the circumstances, you understand? But we must be prepared for anything. . . . Are you all ready?"

They murmured agreement. Besides Strong, who was the father of the children, there were three other men—Shelly, Chertzog and Hill.

Fascinated, they watched Dr Who manipulate the switches. . . .

"Oh! What's happening? Why are we swaying?"

Dot's frightened voice put into words the thought that was in all their minds. For the smooth motion of flight by which *Tardis* transferred its loose pattern of atoms and electrons through the inter-dimensional flux had ceased. The ship was now pitching backwards and forwards. It was an unpleasant motion.

"Hold on to the rails!" rapped Dr Who. "I'll switch on the sight-screen."

The screen glowed with light. But all it showed was a jungle of what seemed to be elephant-grass. It filled every inch of the screen, obviously towering above the space-ship.

"Dear me!" Dr Who rubbed his chin ruefully. "I'm afraid that doesn't tell us whether we are on Earth or not."

"Could be darkest Africa," suggested Chertzog, a tough, middle-aged Dutchman.

"But why the swaying motion?" added Hill, who was taller and grey-haired. "It's almost as if we were at sea."

Dr Who's answer was to busy himself with the controls that would make the preliminary tests of the atmosphere outside. He ran a practised eye over the gauges with their flickering needles.

"Hm! Everything seems to be all right for us to step outside," he announced. Dr Strong, will you stay here with the children and guard my *Tardis*. The rest of us will take a look round outside. Come along, gentlemen!"

The great doors opened and Dr Who stepped outside, wielding his ivory-handled walking-stick like a machete as he forced a way through the jungle.

The others followed. It was hard going. The spiney columns would yield to the thrust of their shoulders, but sprang back into place the moment they had passed.

At last Dr Who rested, panting with exertion. "No use, my dear fellows," he gasped. "I'm afraid the only way to determine where we are is to rise above our circumstances, as it were, hm?"

"You mean take off again in your ship?" asked Shelly, a broad, blond young man.

Dr Who smoothed back his mane of white hair. "Oh no. We shall return to the ship and fit on contra-gravity suits. They will allow us to proceed *upwards*, and so gain a bird's eye view of our position."

Half an hour later they emerged from *Tardis* again, each with a small, round pack strapped to his back. Dr Who touched a control button and rose lightly into the air. The others followed suit, and together they cleared the tops of the jungle of spines and were able at last to see where they had landed.

"Good gracious me!" cried Dr Who.

"Well, *now* I've seen everything!" vowed Shelly, hovering close beside him.

Now they could see that the jungle of spines was the hair covering a huge forearm which ended in a three-toed hairy paw. . . .*Tardis* had landed in the palm of a sleeping monster!

Chertzog came flying towards them, a grim look on his face. He and Hill had taken a quick look at the upper part of the giant. "We'd better get out of this planet—and fast!" he called. "Take a look at this thing's head!"

Dr Who turned the directional switch on his contra-gravity suit and it swung him round in a graceful arc. As he looked down he could not repress a shudder at what he saw. Like the rest of its body, the monster's head was covered with hair. A great, gaping mouth sagged open, revealing tusk-like teeth. Above the mouth spread an ugly expanse of snout-like nose, while in the middle of the wide forehead was a single eye, now closed in sleep.

"A Cyclops, by all that's wonderful!" gasped Shelly.

Dr Who glanced at him curiously. "Ah yes. A Cyclops. . . . Wasn't that a legendary creature on Earth?"

The blond explorer nodded. "A one-eyed giant in Greek Mythology. . . . But this one is no myth!"

"Exactly!" mused Dr Who, staring down with eyes which now saw not the danger but the wonder of a phenomenon entirely new to him. "A Cyclops. . . . Hm! Most interesting!"

The three other men looked at each other with startled expressions.

"Look, Doctor," began Hill, "if this monster wakes up, it will crush your space-ship at the first yawn!"

Dr Who shook his head. "Oh no! Dear me, no! Nothing to worry about there, my dear fellow! No monster is strong enough to crush or destroy my *Tardis*. . . . Still, I think it would be wise to take precautions."

"You mean we're going to leave this planet?" queried Shelly.

Dr Who gave him an irritated look. "Certainly not, young man! I never leave a planet without exploring it. That is the whole purpose of my journeying: to add to my store of knowledge about the Universe . . . about Space . . . about Time!"

Hill scratched his head. "But—well, I don't understand, Doctor! You mean your ship really moves through Time and Space?"

"Quite so!" Dr Who spoke slowly, trying to choose words that would express in simple language the immensely involved reasoning behind his marvellous craft. "The name *Tardis* comes, you see, from the initials 'Time And Relative Dimensions In Space'."

Shelly said after a pause: "Then you could leave this planet immediately—if you wanted to, Doctor?"

"Of course I could!" said Dr Who. "My *Tardis* can do anything, in fact. But come! We must return now."

He touched the directional control on his contra-gravity suit. As he did so there was a warning cry from Chertzog. Dr Who glanced quickly round. Swooping down on them was a spindle-shaped craft made of some highly polished metal and studded with glowing oval windows. Without a whisper it descended from the starry expanse of green that was the sky over this planet.

As the needle-nosed craft passed over their heads, the four men felt themselves plucked towards it as if by an invisible hand. For a few moments the craft hovered, motionless. A hatch slid open and the captives were drawn gently inside. Then, with the merest sigh from its ultrasonic power units, the ship sped on its way.

Dr Who and his companions looked around them at the steel walls of the air-lock into which they had been drawn.

A gobbling voice rapped out an instruction: "Remove your flying gear!"

Dr Who shrugged and began to obey. The others followed suit.

Chertzog said in a low voice: "Notice the language? It's more like a gobble! Any idea what planet it belongs to, Doctor?"

He shook his head. "Not the least idea. I must have heard thousands of strange tongues in my travels, but never one like that."

Shelly eased his contra-gravity suit from his shoulders and lowered it with a grunt of relief. "Who cares what language it is?" he remarked. "The important thing is we can understand it—thanks to the automatic mental adjuster in your *Tardis*."

The gobbling voice spoke again: "You are prisoners. Obey all orders. You will put down your arms and offer no resistance."

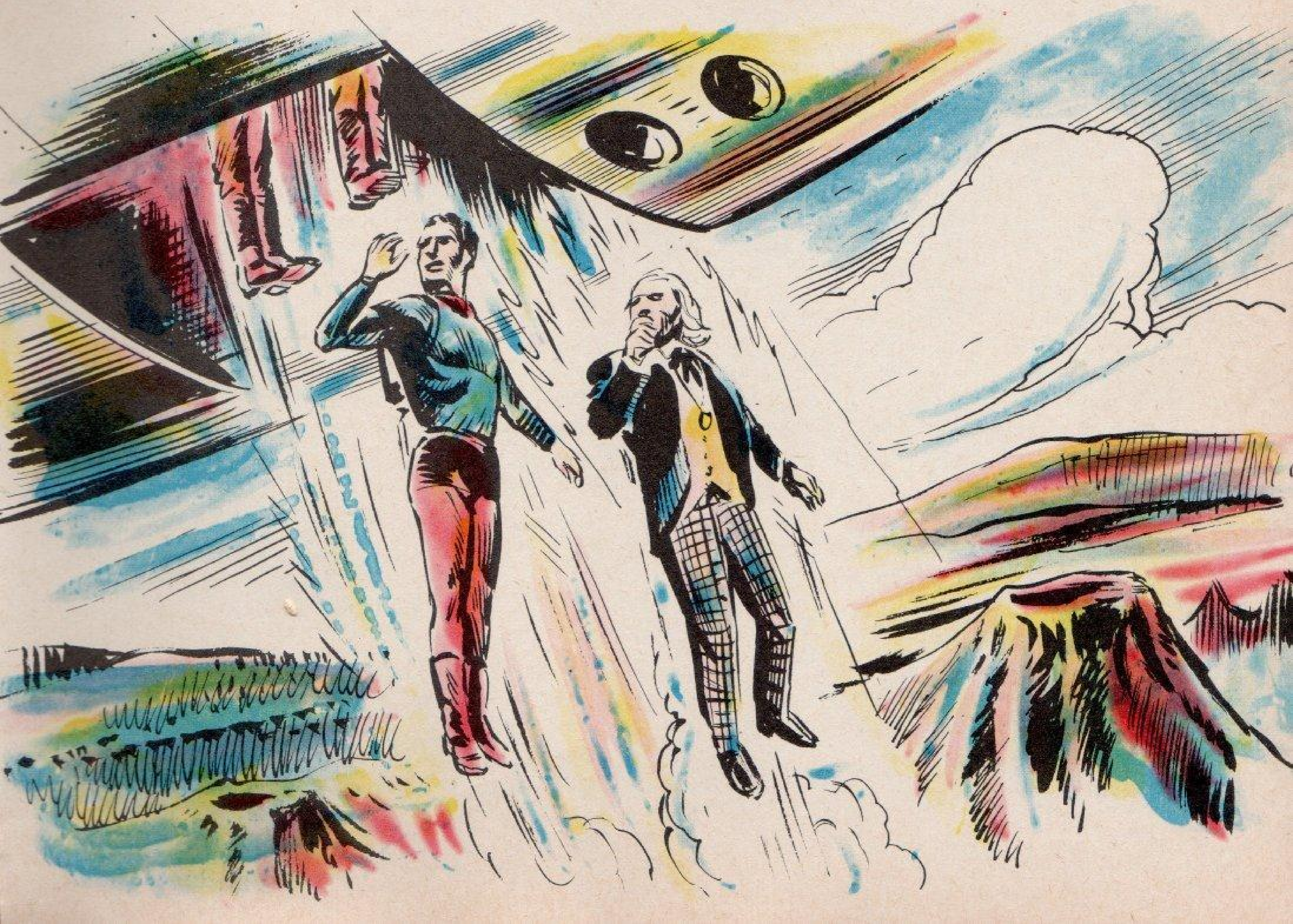
Dr Who shook his head, aware that invisible eyes were watching from the darkness beyond the door. "We have no arms, and we mean you no harm," he replied. "We are—er—space explorers, who seem to have landed in a most unfortunate predicament. May we throw ourselves upon your mercy, and ask for help?"

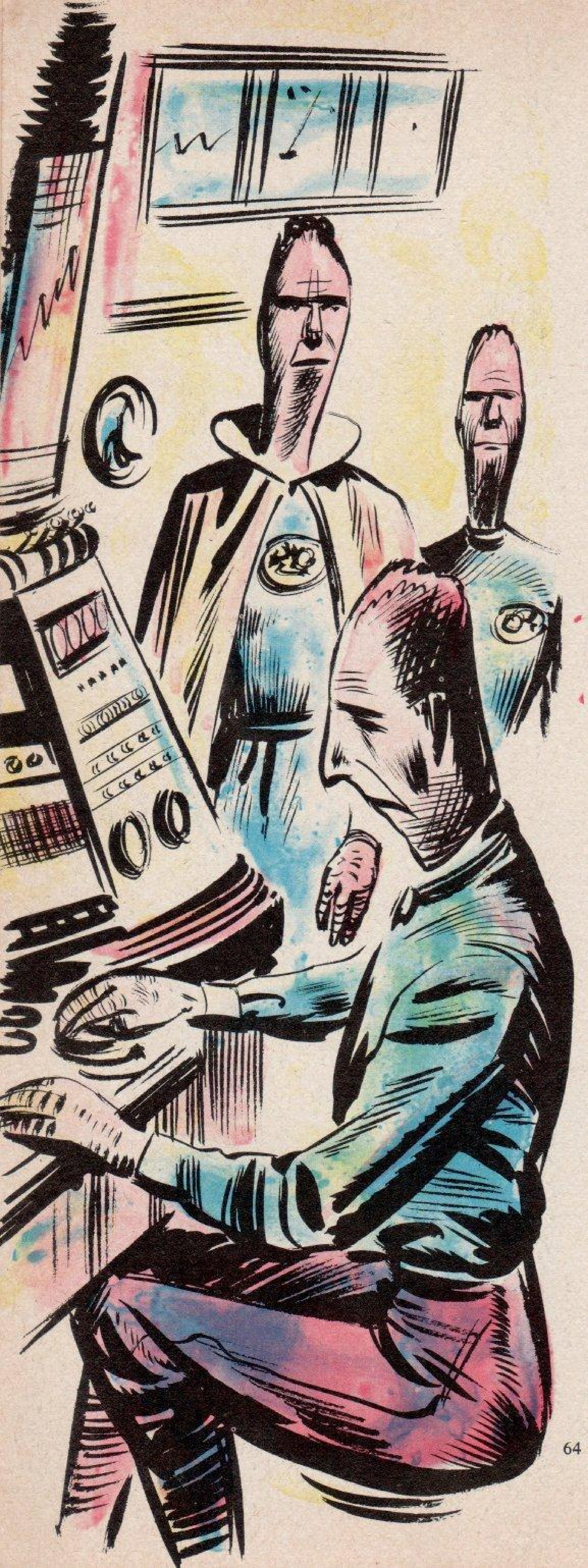
There was a whispered consultation of gobbledy voices beyond the door. Then the first voice spoke again. "Walk inside. But remember—one false move and you die."

Dr Who stepped forward immediately. Chertzog put a restraining hand on his arm. "Doctor—be careful. . . ."

"My dear fellow, one must place trust in providence at a time like this," smiled Dr Who. Then his face grew grave: "And remember, Dr Strong and the twins are still in *Tardis*, unaware of where it has landed. . . . Come! Follow me!"

As he entered the cabin, Dr Who saw that it was lit by a dull red radiance. The curving walls





were crammed with instruments. At the far end were three figures, two of which held bulbous weapons in their hands, something like a highwayman's pistol of old. They wore tunics emblazoned with an emblem incorporating circling planets and birdlike crest.

The three figures themselves were remarkably like birds: red-brown in colour, completely hairless, with long necks, almost chinless lower jaws and red crests, like roosters' combs, on the tops of their heads.

The one without a weapon was obviously the leader. He wore a long red robe. "You will tell me how you come to be in this galaxy, and what you were doing hovering above the giant Fo," he addressed the visitors.

Dr Who wasted no time. Briefly he detailed their flight from Corbo, and how his space-time craft had materialised upon the hand of the sleeping giant. "My friends are still in the ship," he concluded. "Can you help us?"

The hen-like people listened to this with heads on one side. Another gobbled conference followed.

Then the leader gave his reply: "We shall return to see if Fo has awakened yet."

Leaving his companions on guard, the leader busied himself at a control panel. In a few moments he peered through an observation window. Then he turned and beckoned to Dr Who and his companions.

"The giant has gone," he told them.

Sick with dismay, Dr Who stared down upon a deserted valley. "But—are you sure? Is this the right spot?" he asked.

For answer the hen-leader pressed a switch and two viewscreens came into operation, giving a ten-power modification of the ground below. Clearly now could be traced the outline left by the sleeping giant. Trees and bushes upon which he had lain were even now springing back into place.

Shelly slapped one fist into another in an agony of despair. "He must have crushed *Tardis* in his paw," he ground out. "Those poor kids and Dr Strong——"

Dr Who held up a restraining hand. "My dear fellow, I have already told you that *Tardis* cannot be crushed. The giant must have taken the ship with him. We must follow and see."

He turned and put his request urgently to the hen-leader. But the other held up a claw-like hand in refusal. "I have no authority to go after Fo. It would be too dangerous. I must return to base."

"But look here, this is a matter of utmost urgency," began Dr Who.

But he saw that the leader had turned away, and the crew of the scout-craft were already busying themselves about their duties.

Hill came close to Dr Who and whispered in his ear: "Let's try and jump them? Those controls look simple enough. We can follow the Cyclops ourselves."

Dr Who shook his head firmly. "These people have been fair and friendly towards us. We need them. We shall try to persuade them when they land."

The flight could not have lasted more than half an hour, but it seemed like an eternity to the four tense men.

Outwardly Dr Who was the calmest, but his mind was a turmoil of anxious doubts, To even consider the temporary loss of his precious *Tardis*—filled with unique electronic instruments that made his journeys through Time and Space possible—made him writhe inwardly. His agony of mind was increased by the thought of Harroll Strong and Dot and Jack trapped inside the ship. . . .

"Dr Who! Come here quickly!" An anxious cry from Chertzog roused him from his grim thoughts. He joined the other three as they stood staring at the two viewscreens.

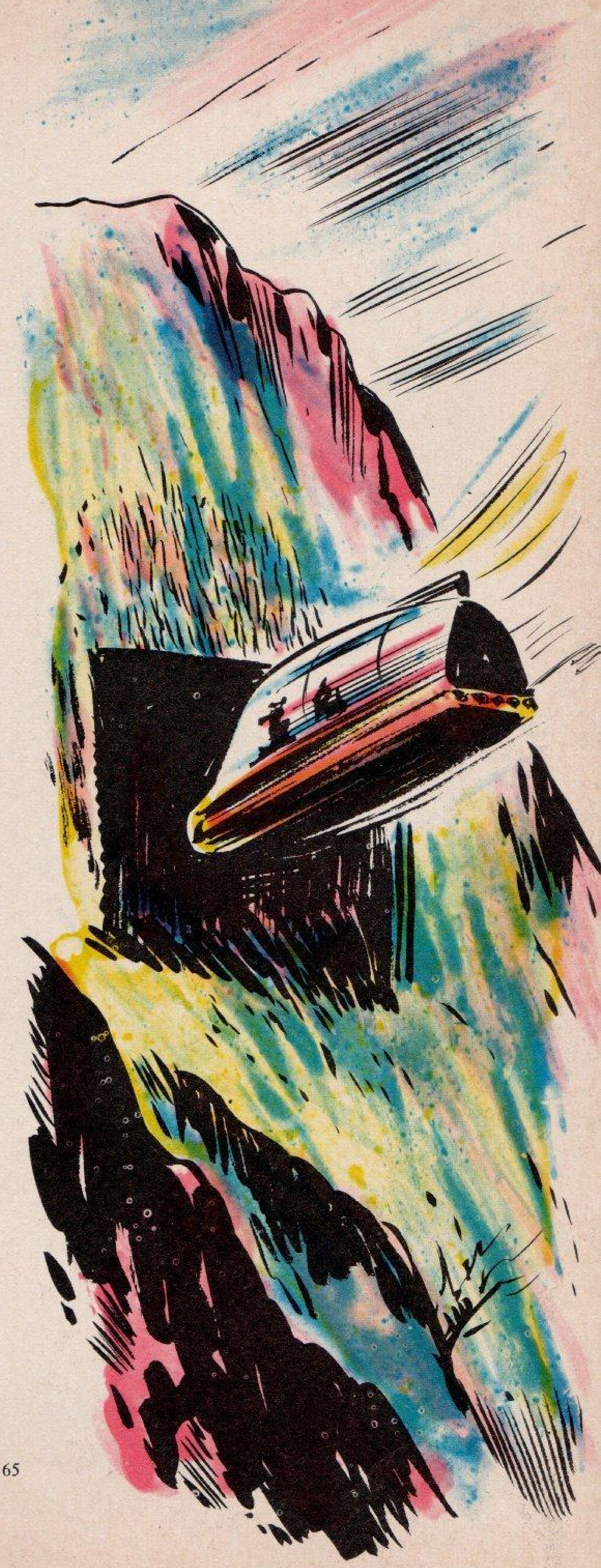
"They're diving straight for that hillside, Doctor!" gasped Hill. "We've got to stop them."

The magnified view on the screens was alarming enough to make even Dr Who step back in alarm. The scout-craft was apparently diving headlong towards the barren slopes of a hill. He whirled around, but seeing the calmness of the crew, he recovered his own composure.

"H'm . . . I rather imagine that our friends here have no intention of crashing this ship," he told the others.

Even as they looked at the screens again, they could see that a section of the hillside was opening to admit the craft into a secret base. It slowed to a gentle glide, ghosting into a black void, and stopped.

The crew leader beckoned his prisoners to follow him. They emerged on to a platform. The other two crew members followed behind, and the party began to descend a flight of steps to



the main street of what was no less than an underground city.

The buildings were built with vast domes of what appeared to be heavy plastic blocks over interlocking steel frameworks. They were lit from inside, and diffused a soft light all around them.

The street was full of hen-people, hurrying about in an industrious way. But at the sight of the prisoners they halted and began to gobble in great excitement. Something akin to a traffic jam would have ensued, had not the leader in the red robe gobbled a harsh warning and waved aside the onlookers as he strode to the door of the largest domed building.

Dr Who and his companions were not sorry to be hustled indoors away from the excited crowd. They were taken straight into a chamber in which another of the hen-people sat behind a desk. It was obvious that the news of their capture had been radioed from the craft.

The person behind the desk ran a claw-hand over his fine red comb, and gazed keenly at each prisoner in turn. At length he began to gobble softly: "You were brought here as prisoners. Now I welcome you as strangers. . . . Please sit down. . . . Ff'ni, bring them food."

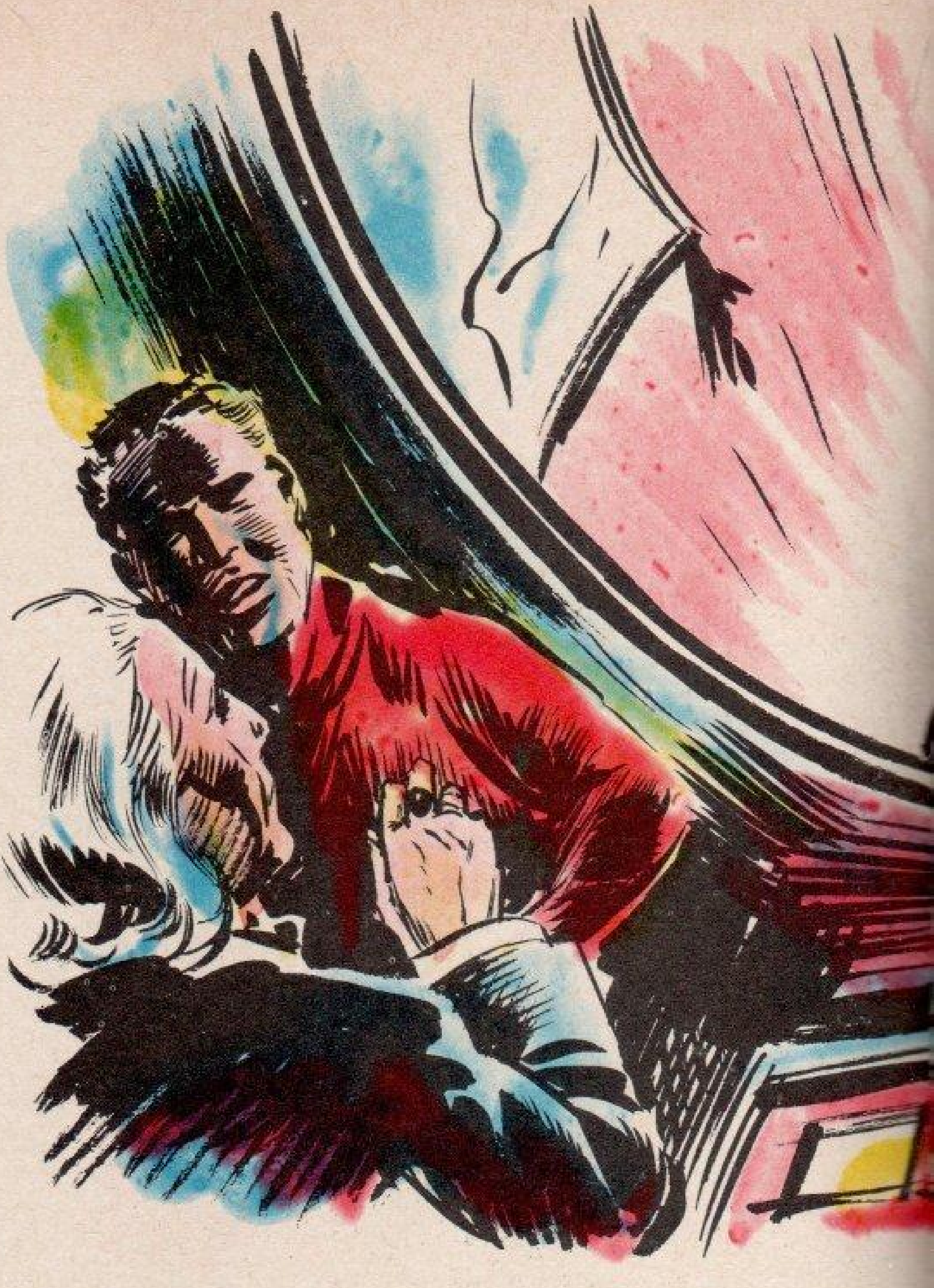
The leader of the scout-craft bowed and withdrew. The four men smiled at each other in relief and turned to find that a comfortable couch had risen out of the floor behind them. They sat down.

"Thank you. . . . Thank you, my friend," said Dr Who. "May I ask what planet this is? You see, the controls of my—er—ship. . . ."

The person at the desk waved him to silence. "Yes, I understand. . . . This, friend, is the planet Rhoos. We are the eighth planet in the P'Tuu System."

Dr Who sat up straight, eyes glowing with interest. "The P'Tuu System. . . . Ah yes, indeed. . . . One of the places I have always planned to visit. Yes indeed. Now, let me see, your planet must be third of a GO-star, eighty million miles from primary, less axial inclination than Terra. . . . Ah! That accounts for your organic matter and temperature being so much like Earth!"

The other looked at him with open respect. "You are a very learned man, Doctor. I and my people—the Kaarks—will help you to recover your ship . . . I, the Kaark Supremo, have decreed it."



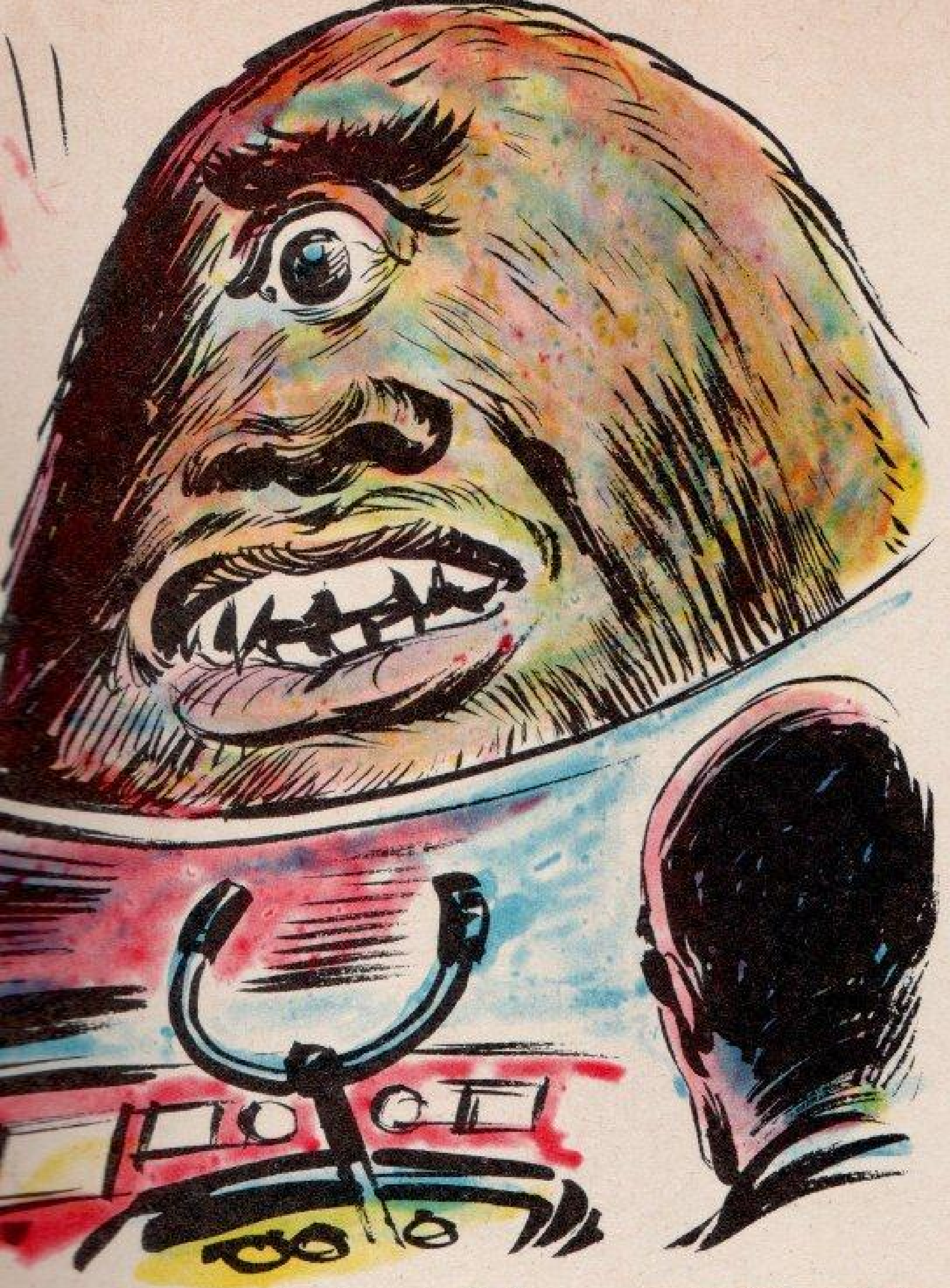
Dr Who sprang to his feet and took a step forward. "Thank you. . . . But—you speak of recovering my ship! Have you news about it?"

Kaark Supremo gobbled in reassurance. "Our Scouts have seen Fo returning to his base. . . . In his paw he was carrying—with great care—a blue box-like craft with a flashing light on top."

"That's it! That's my *Tardis*!" interrupted Dr Who. He hurried forward, leaned across the desk and clasped the Supremo by the hand. "Ah, my friend, if you only knew what good news that is. For, you see, there are two children and their father still in the craft."

The three other men were crowding round the desk now, beaming with relief. When Ff'ni arrived with a tray of food a moment later, the Supremo signalled him to put it on the desk. The hungry explorers stood around, eating in buffet-style, while their hosts told them of the terror in which the Kaarks spent their lives.

"Fo is not a monster native to the planet Rhoos," he said. "He is an outcast from a race of one-eyed giants far off in the Black Galaxy. He was set adrift in space, but eventually he crashed on our planet. Since then our life has



been a nightmare. Before we retreated underground, hiding our towns and cities in hillsides like this, Fo ravaged the whole of Rhoos. He slaughtered countless numbers of my people. He has made us his playthings—and we can do nothing to stop him. The best of our weapons are no more than pin-pricks to him. . . . All we can do is to spy on his movements constantly."

Dr Who finished eating, and wiped the corners of his mouth with a silk handkerchief. "My dear Kaark Supremo, it is a dreadful situation you are in. I will try and think of some way in which to help. But, in the meantime, I want you to instruct one of your scout-craft to take my friends and I to the lair of this Fo. We must rescue Dr Strong and the twins as speedily as possible."

The ruler rose to his feet behind the desk. With a harassed movement he ran his hand over his comb. "This is a mission of great danger. Despite his primitive appearance, Fo is well versed in scientific matters, and his stronghold bristles with defences. Some of these have been constructed by Kaark scientists and technicians whom Fo has snatched away and holds prisoners."

Chertzog leaned forward on the desk, his face drawn and intense. "But, sir, you will at least show us to his stronghold? The risk is ours . . . and however great, it must be taken."

The Supremo caressed his chinless lower jaw. "My friend, you are a brave man. I admire you." He turned. "Ff'ni, you will take our friends to Fo's stronghold."

Ten minutes later the scout-craft rose from the hidden opening to the underground city, and sped across the green expanse of sky. Dr Who and his companions stood around the viewscreens. Fields and rivers, plains and mountains passed rapidly across the screens, until at last the landscape became barren and hostile—a place of vast cliffs and deep ravines.

Suddenly they saw it. The walls of a huge fortress towered up in the screens. But, even as they stared in awe, beams of light began to wink from the rocky ramparts. Ff'ni gobbled in alarm. His fellow crewmen leapt to the control panels, but it was too late to correct their blunder. They had come within range of the giant's defensive beams and already the scout-craft was being drawn downwards.

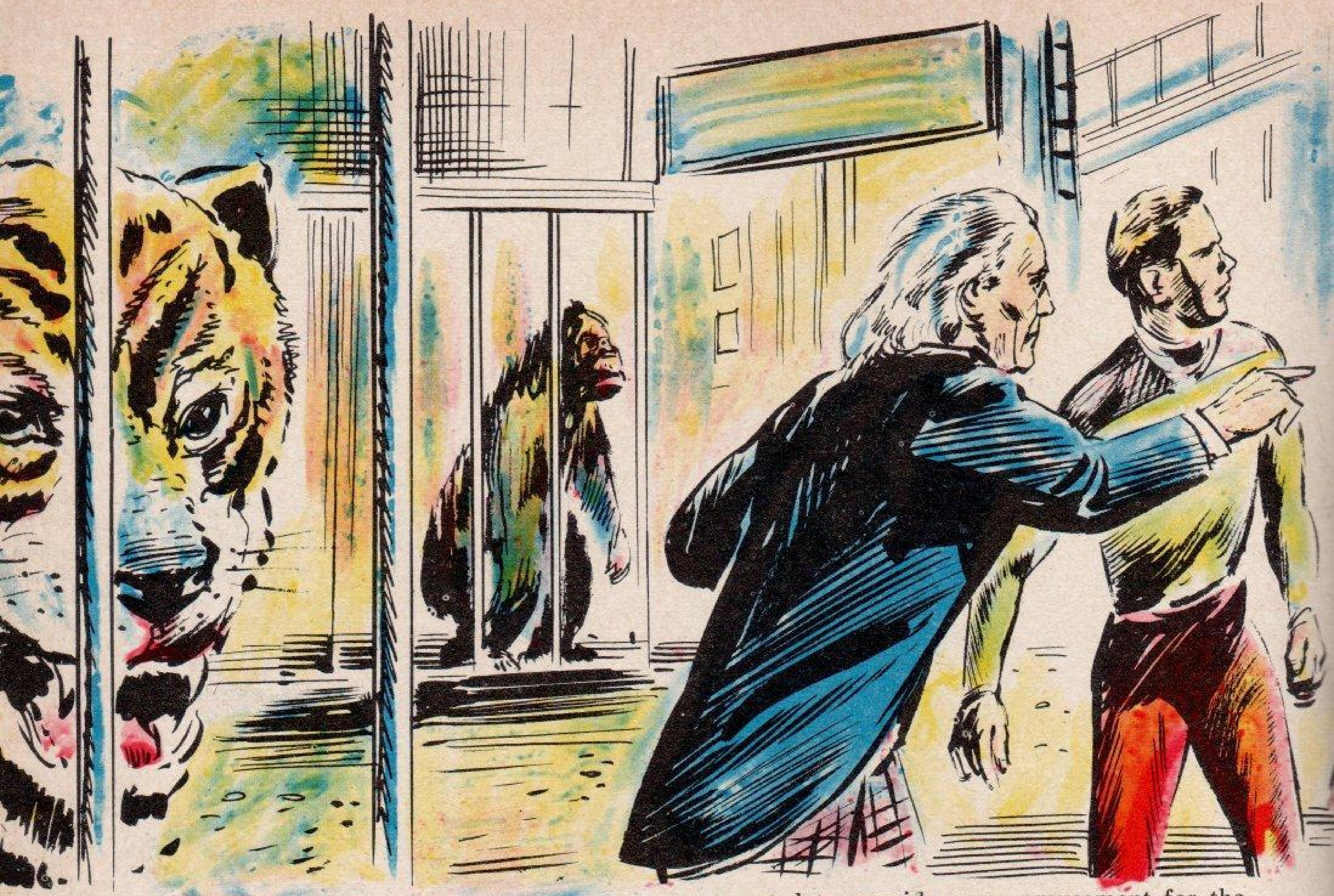
Panic-stricken, the Kaark crewmen clawed at the levers which operated their own weapons. Flaming missiles spewed from a dozen tubes. Seconds later the white, actinic glare of phase-shift explosions lit the landscape. But still the scout-craft was drawn down into the fortress. . . .

"Look!" yelled Hill. He was pointing at the viewscreens. They showed a hairy paw, claws crooked, swooping straight towards them.

They flung themselves down, grabbing on to the safety-rails. The craft lurched violently. There was a crackling from the control panels, wires fused and hissed, the viewscreens went blank, and the ship was plunged into total darkness. . . .

Light came flooding back into the cabin as the whole top structure of the scout-craft was wrenched off. The occupants had a brief, horrifying glimpse of Fo's single eye peering down at them. Then the craft was turned upside-down, and they were thrown out with bone-shaking bumps.

Dr Who struggled to his feet, breathless and bruised. He saw the Cyclops's huge hairy face suspended overhead, and instinctively he shrank away. But when the giant showed no further sign of hostility, Dr Who began to look around



him at his surroundings. To his astonishment, he found that there were buildings and streets here, too.

"What's the set-up, Doctor?"

He turned to find Chertzog beside him, nursing a bump on his head.

"My dear fellow," said Dr Who slowly, "I am inclined to think we, too, have become the playthings of Fo. . . . Look around you! We appear to have been put down on some kind of table upon which he has built a model town."

Shelly had joined them as they were talking and he clutched Dr Who's arm. "You must be right! Take a look inside those buildings," he exclaimed.

Staring at the new arrivals from behind barred windows, were rows of faces, the hairless, red-brown faces, topped by red crests, of the Kaarks.

Ff'ni and his companions rushed forward, and the air was filled with excited gobblings as the prisoners conversed with them.

Dr Who stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Apparently those are the scientists and technicians that Fo compels to work for him. . . . But come! Apparently as playthings we are expected to provide some amusement for the Cyclops. Let us see if we can locate *Tardis*."

He strode away. Rounding the corner of a row of what looked like cages, he stopped short. An angry chorus of snarling greeted his appearance.

"By thunder, he keeps a model zoo as well!" said Hill, rounding the corner with his companions.

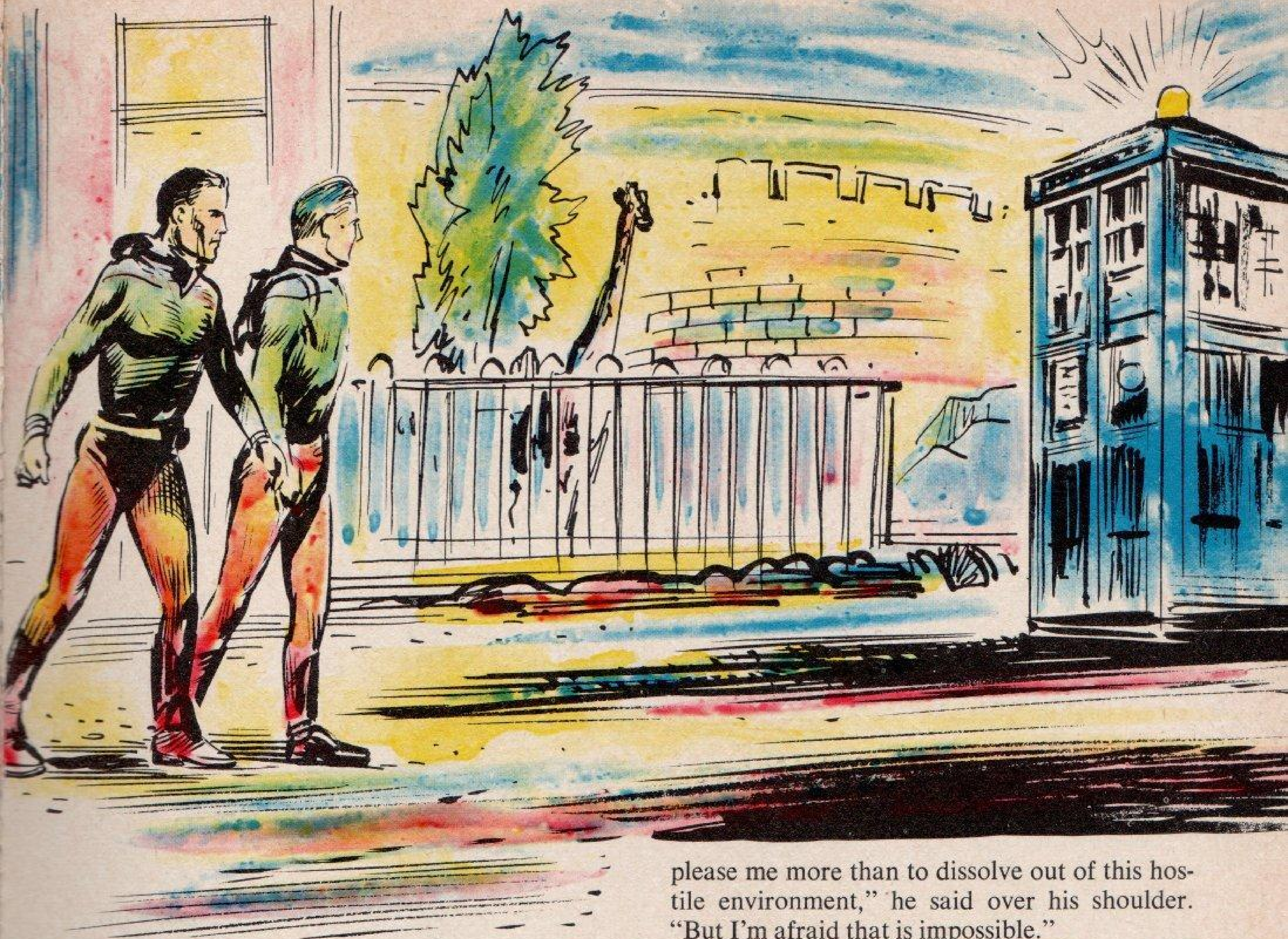
"And what specimens!" muttered Chertzog with a shudder. "Just look at those teeth! I suppose these must be the leopards of this planet. . . ."

"I'm glad they're kept behind bars," mused Shelly.

Dr Who shook his head, frowning. "I don't wish to alarm you, gentlemen, but I rather think these beasts are kept for another kind of sport." He pointed. "Yes, I rather fancy that must be his arena," he added.

They looked at the enclosed area ahead, noticing the red stains on the floor. Dr Who's casual words brought a dawning horror of realisation.

Shelly swallowed hard and turned pale. "He puts his prisoners in there to fight those—those. . . ?" His voice trailed off.



"Just like the martyrs in the Colosseum!" breathed Hill, half to himself.

But something else had caught Dr Who's eye—"*Tardis*!" he cried. "Come on!"

He began to run, followed by the others. Thankfully he saw that the doors were still closed. He fumbled for the electronic key which he wore round his neck on a chain. He slipped it into the lock and flung himself inside, the others tumbling after him.

"Doctor!" There was a shrill cry from Dot.

She came running across the spacious floor of the Time-Space ship, and flung herself into his arms. Jack began a triumphant war-dance around the two of them, and Harroll Strong looked on with a smile.

When the hugging and handshaking had subsided, Shelly turned urgently to Dr Who. "Quick, Doctor! Let's get *Tardis* out of this planet before the Cyclops gets any more bright ideas!" he urged.

Dr Who turned away and snapped on the switches of the sight-screen. "Nothing would please me more than to dissolve out of this hostile environment," he said over his shoulder. "But I'm afraid that is impossible."

Strong stepped forward, frowning. "You mean there's something wrong with the ship, Doctor? Did that monster damage it while carrying us back here?"

Dr Who shook his head. "No. Everything appears to be in order, thank goodness. . . . What I mean is that I could not possibly leave the Kaarks to the mercy of Fo. I have promised to try and help them—and help them I will!"

They all turned to look at the sight-screen. It showed the arena outside. Dr Who clenched his fists in sudden anger at the sight of Ff'ni, held by the hem of his red robe between two of Fo's huge claws.

"The monster!" ground out Dr Who. "He is going to let loose one of those wild-cats. . . . I hope to Heaven I shall be in time."

The others watched the giant's grim preparations on the sight-screens, while Dr Who ran to his store-room. He came back with a small black box under his arm. "I fancy this should take care of Fo!" he told the others as he ran towards the door.

The twins ran after him. "But Doctor—what about the leopard?" cried Dot. "It will kill you."

Dr Who calmly took his walking-stick from the rack by the door. "Don't worry, my child," he said gently. "I think the leopard is in for a shock, too."

When he emerged from *Tardis*, the frantic gobbling of Ff'ni, mingled with the snarl of the wild beast, told Dr Who that Fo had already set his grim game in motion. The Kaark pilot was in the arena, retreating before the slashing claws of the leopard.

"Hold on, Ff'ni!" yelled Dr Who, running towards him. At the sound of his voice, the savage beast whirled round.

But Dr Who never hesitated. He walked calmly towards the leopard, twirling his stick before him. At the same time he uttered a low, menacing sound in the back of his throat. The effect was almost instantaneous. The big cat began to cringe away, snarling. Lower and lower it crouched, stark fear in its eyes. Closer and closer came Dr Who. . . . Five feet, four, three. . . .

Suddenly Dr Who lunged at the cat with his cane. With a howl of terror it turned and streaked away.

Dr Who whipped round. A rumbling like thunder above his head told him of the giant's wrath. He glanced upwards. The hairy paw was already poised to crush him. Quickly he put the black box on the ground, flung back the lid, and threw himself to the ground.

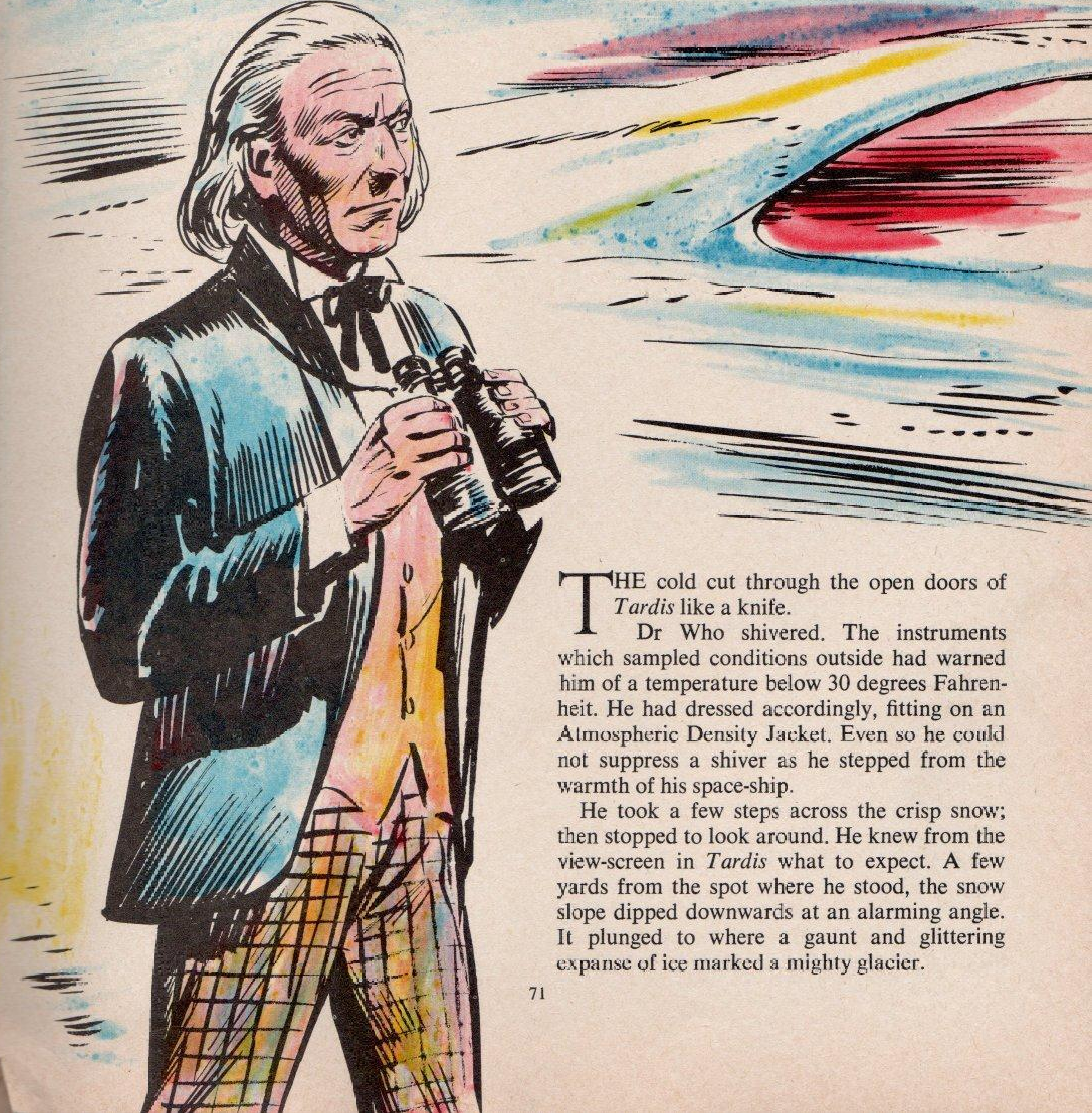
There was an awful blue flash of light from the box. The smell of ozone filled the air. . . .

For a few moments the ground trembled alarmingly with the crash of Fo's lifeless body. Slowly Dr Who rose to his feet and began to dust his clothes. Ff'ni ran to him, gobbling his gratitude.

The doctor smiled wearily and patted his shoulder. "All right, my friend. No need to thank me. One good turn deserves another, you know. . . . And now that Rhoos is free of the Cyclops, I really must be going. My friends in there are most anxious to get back to Earth. . . . Good-bye, Ff'ni! Give my regards to the Supremo!"

And, picking up his walking-stick, Dr Who walked slowly back to *Tardis* and stepped inside.

Justice of the GLACIANS



THE cold cut through the open doors of *Tardis* like a knife.

Dr Who shivered. The instruments which sampled conditions outside had warned him of a temperature below 30 degrees Fahrenheit. He had dressed accordingly, fitting on an Atmospheric Density Jacket. Even so he could not suppress a shiver as he stepped from the warmth of his space-ship.

He took a few steps across the crisp snow; then stopped to look around. He knew from the view-screen in *Tardis* what to expect. A few yards from the spot where he stood, the snow slope dipped downwards at an alarming angle. It plunged to where a gaunt and glittering expanse of ice marked a mighty glacier.

Dr Who focused his powerful binoculars and surveyed the glacier. A murmer of admiration escaped his lips. "Most amazing! Why, it must be twenty miles long at least!"

He studied this awe-inspiring natural phenomenon with great excitement.

He had not expected to find himself on a frozen planet when he had charted a course for *Tardis* through the unknown interstellar barrier beyond the G-Star in Ambivalence Five.

This planet had several moons of various sizes which seemed to float above the needle-sharp peaks of the snow summits. Fantastic ice sculptures soared around him. Here were gaunt boulders buried by the advancing ice sheet a million years before and finally thrust to the surface by centuries of melting and movement. Half a mile to his right, a slender white arch of windblown snow sprang thirty feet in the air to span a yawning crevasse.

Dr Who was about to lower the glasses when he caught a movement on the slope which rose directly opposite to where he stood.

He had trouble in getting the man—if it *was* a man—into vision. For the figure was moving at breakneck speed, shooting down the slope and sending up a spray of snow particles from his skis. . . . Or *were* they skis?

For a fleeting second Dr Who managed to keep the fast-moving figure in view. It was squat, of powerful build and humanoid in appearance, clad from head to foot in furs. But he could see no sign of skis on the other's feet. He was apparently skiing down that precipitous slope on his own feet!

The figure shot out of vision again, and Dr Who lowered his binoculars.

"Good gracious me!" he exclaimed aloud. "Perhaps the poor creature is sliding to his doom!"

He raised the glasses again. This time the snow-capped peak came into view. And before Dr Who could lower his sights to find the fur-clad figure, a brilliant greenish glow winked from the distant peak.

For a moment Dr Who was dazzled. He could see nothing. But when his eyes had re-adjusted themselves, he saw to his amazement that four more fur-clad figures were beginning the death-defying slide. . . .

Then he saw the source of the greenish glow that had dazzled him. For each squat figure was carrying a tubular weapon. He saw one figure take aim down the slope, and once again that weird greenish glow dazzled Dr Who.

He lowered his glasses and rubbed his smarting eyes.

"Dear me! It would seem that I have intruded upon a pursuit of some sort," he mused. "The four with weapons are trying to kill the other poor creature—although I fancy he may do that himself, unless he can stop before he gets to the crevasse."

He looked again. The fugitive had seen the danger and was vainly trying to stop. Lower and lower he crouched, thick arms flailing and spray shooting up as he desperately dug in with his feet. But it was no use. He was off the snow and on to the solid ice of the glacier now. He had no chance of stopping. He must plunge over the crevasse!

Dr Who wasted no more time. He raced back to *Tardis* and emerged a moment later with a rope. On his feet he had strapped his Zero Boots, a cunning combination of snow-shoes, crampons and skis, which he had invented for just such inhospitable planets as this.

This time it was *he* who took a dreadful risk in descending the snow slope. But, ten minutes later, panting desperately, Dr Who was on the glacier. Now his amazing boots began to prove their worth. As he felt his legs begin to slide away from under him, he touched the control button on his belt, which made the crampons bite deep into the ice.

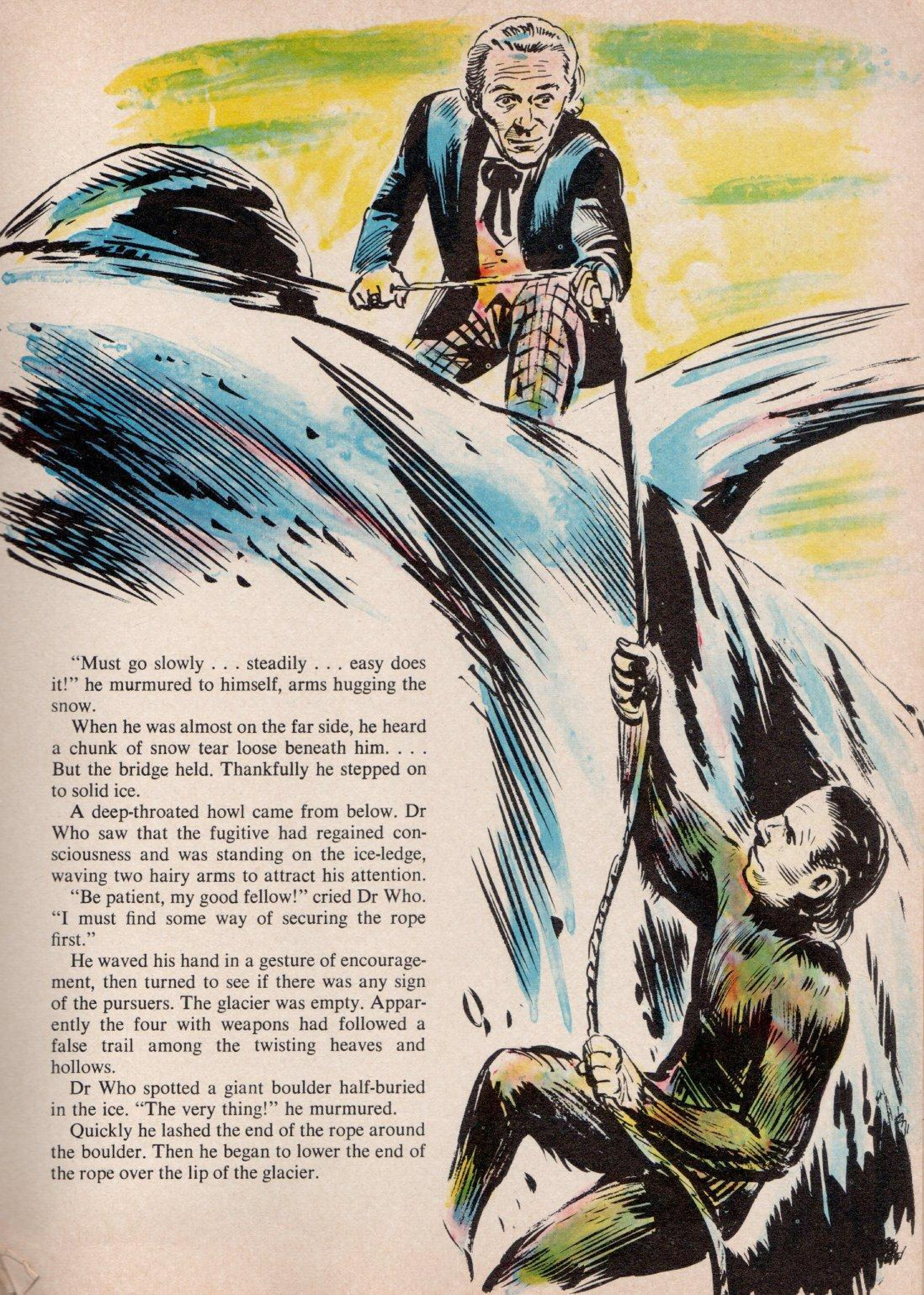
Gradually the hair-raising slide slowed to a walking-pace. Dr Who saw the black shadow of the crevasse yawning at his feet. He dug in hard, and stopped on the edge.

"Oh dear, dear me!" he gasped. "What an exhausting experience! . . . Now, where is that poor fellow. . . ?"

He glanced down into the twisting fissure which plunged to the very depth of the ice pack. On a ledge of ice some ten feet below the lip of the crevasse, lay the figure of the runaway. It sprawled like a heap of furs, but made no move.

"Hm! It looks as if he has had a very narrow escape," said Dr Who. "I should be able to get the rope down to him—if I can get across the crevasse."

He moved quickly towards the slender arch of windblown snow which bridged the crevasse. Gingerly he began to crawl across on all fours.



"Must go slowly . . . steadily . . . easy does it!" he murmured to himself, arms hugging the snow.

When he was almost on the far side, he heard a chunk of snow tear loose beneath him. . . . But the bridge held. Thankfully he stepped on to solid ice.

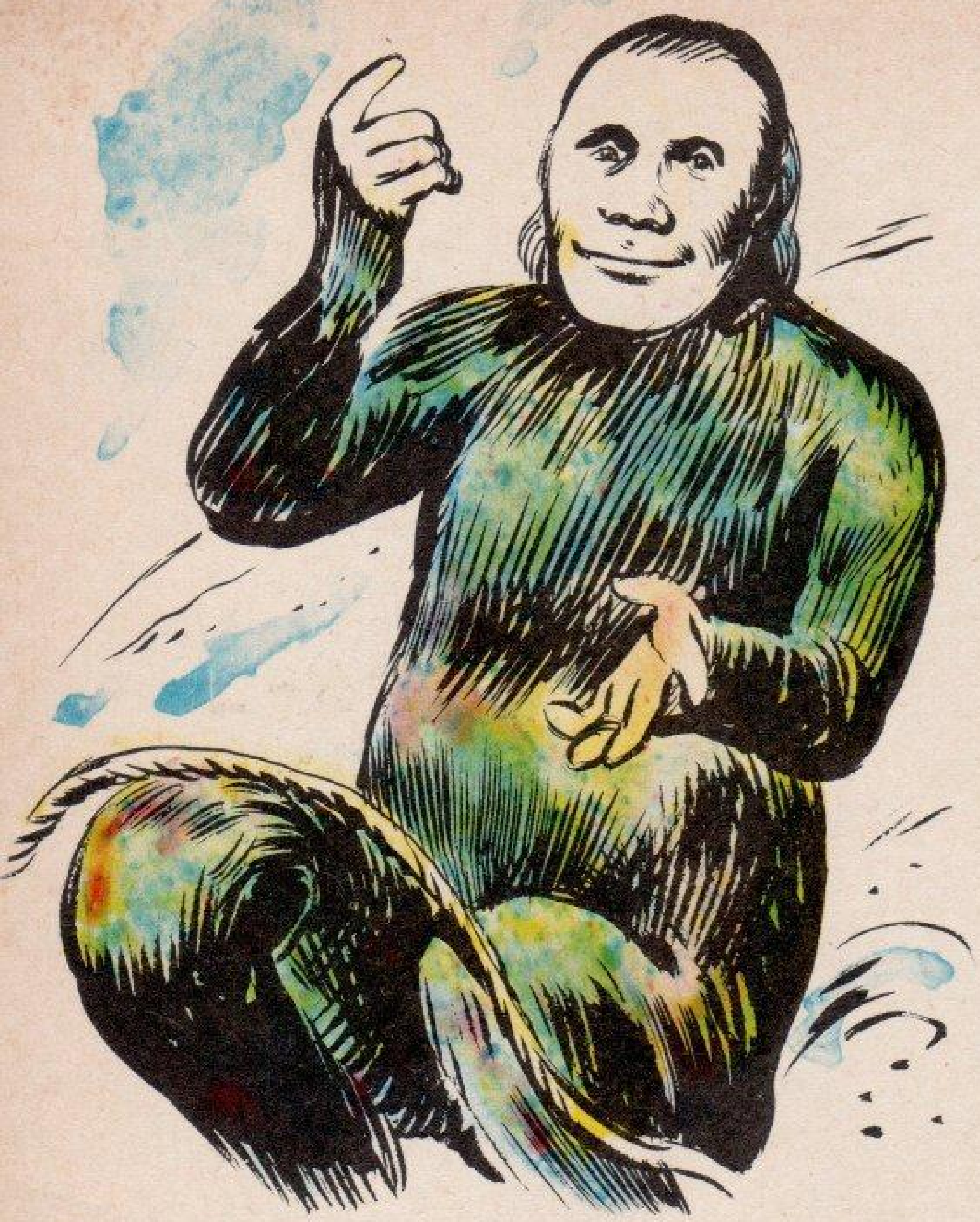
A deep-throated howl came from below. Dr Who saw that the fugitive had regained consciousness and was standing on the ice-ledge, waving two hairy arms to attract his attention.

"Be patient, my good fellow!" cried Dr Who. "I must find some way of securing the rope first."

He waved his hand in a gesture of encouragement, then turned to see if there was any sign of the pursuers. The glacier was empty. Apparently the four with weapons had followed a false trail among the twisting heaves and hollows.

Dr Who spotted a giant boulder half-buried in the ice. "The very thing!" he murmured.

Quickly he lashed the end of the rope around the boulder. Then he began to lower the end of the rope over the lip of the glacier.



A few moments later, the rope was drawn taut. Leaning over the edge, Dr Who saw the figure climbing swiftly upwards.

With a grunt, the fugitive heaved himself on to the ice.

Anyone less accustomed to meeting the grotesque life-forms that exist on other planets might have felt a sense of revulsion at this encounter. But Dr Who merely smiled and nodded to the creature he had just rescued.

Covered from head to foot with a luxuriant growth of silky fur, the creature had the powerful build of a grizzly bear. But the face was hairless and smooth, almost human in appearance, although the mouth was too wide and the eyes set too far back on each side of a flat, spreading nose.

The fugitive spoke in a deep guttural tone. "You may command me! You have saved my life!"

Dr Who waved a deprecating hand. "Nonsense, my friend. I have no wish to command. I am very glad I arrived in time to save you."

The creature was looking with wonder at the other's clothes. "You are a creature of this planet?" came the question.

Dr Who shook his head and smiled. "No. I am a traveller. I'm a visitor to your world, and I must say I find it a very cold kind of world. . . . But you, my friend, what is your name? And what is the name of this planet?"

The fugitive picked up a lump of ice and began to rub the cuts and bruises he had suffered in the fall. "I am Grahm," he said. "This is the planet Bruhl."

Dr Who nodded. "And would I be mistaken in assuming that you were fleeing from those four who carried weapons, Grahm?"

The other's smooth face became grim. "They were from the Planet Police. They were trying to hunt me down because they say I stole a thought-cube."

Dr Who considered the creature carefully. "And *did* you steal it, Grahm?"

"No!" It was almost a shout, accompanied by a vigorous shake of his furry head. "I did not steal it! I was running away to try and prove my innocence. . . . But I know it's no use now. I may as well give up. The Planet Police will track me down wherever I go."

Dr Who put his head to one side and considered the matter. "But my dear fellow, one must appeal to law and order. You will surely get a fair trial, and be able to tell your side of the story?"

Grahm uttered a discordant growl. "Never! Since Rraprro became the Wise One of the Glacians, we have not known justice. Only tyranny! It is better to die out here, riddled with the rays of their Ultra-Beam guns, than go back to the City Under the Ice."

Dr Who came to a sudden decision. "Listen, Grahm," he said. "I can offer you sanctuary in my space-ship, but we must hurry and cross the snow-bridge before those four pick up your tracks."

The Glacian looked bewildered. "What is 'sanctuary'? And where is your ship?"

Dr Who turned swiftly. The mountain peaks were echoing to the howls of the Planet Police.

"Quickly! There is no time to explain!" he exclaimed. "They have apparently found your trail. Come! We must cross the bridge at once."

They began to run. Dr Who found little difficulty, thanks to his crampons. But for Grahm, the huge elongated feet which had allowed him to ski down the snow-slopes, now threatened to become toboggans to carry him over the edge again. Dr Who grabbed his companion, and with extraordinary strength brought him to a standstill.

"Hold on to me!" he ordered. "We are nearly at the bridge."

They had covered half the distance towards it when Grahm gave a warning howl. "The police! Get down!"

As they flung themselves to the ice, there was a brilliant flicker of green light behind them.

Dr Who raised his head and saw the ray from the Ultra-Beam Gun strike the centre of the huge snow-bridge. At once it began to crumble, with a rumbling and roaring noise. Thousands of tons of packed snow thundered down into the fissure.

Slowly Dr Who rose to his feet. He cast a quick glance to where his *Tardis* was perched; then he turned to meet the four Glacian police.

They advanced with guns trained upon Dr Who and the cowering Grahm.

The leader was a Glacian of tremendous girth. He had lost one eye, but with the remaining one he surveyed Dr Who closely.

"What are you, and where did you come from?" he rumbled.

"I am a traveller," said Dr Who airily. "I have come from——"

He broke off, wondering. What should he say? What *could* he say? His endless wanderings through Time and Space had taken him into so many strange places in the universe that his origins had long since been forgotten.

The Glacian's face was watching him closely and for a moment Dr Who thought he detected a sudden flash of cunning in that single, glittering eye.

"Ah! You must have had something to do with the theft of the thought-cube!" growled the Glacian.

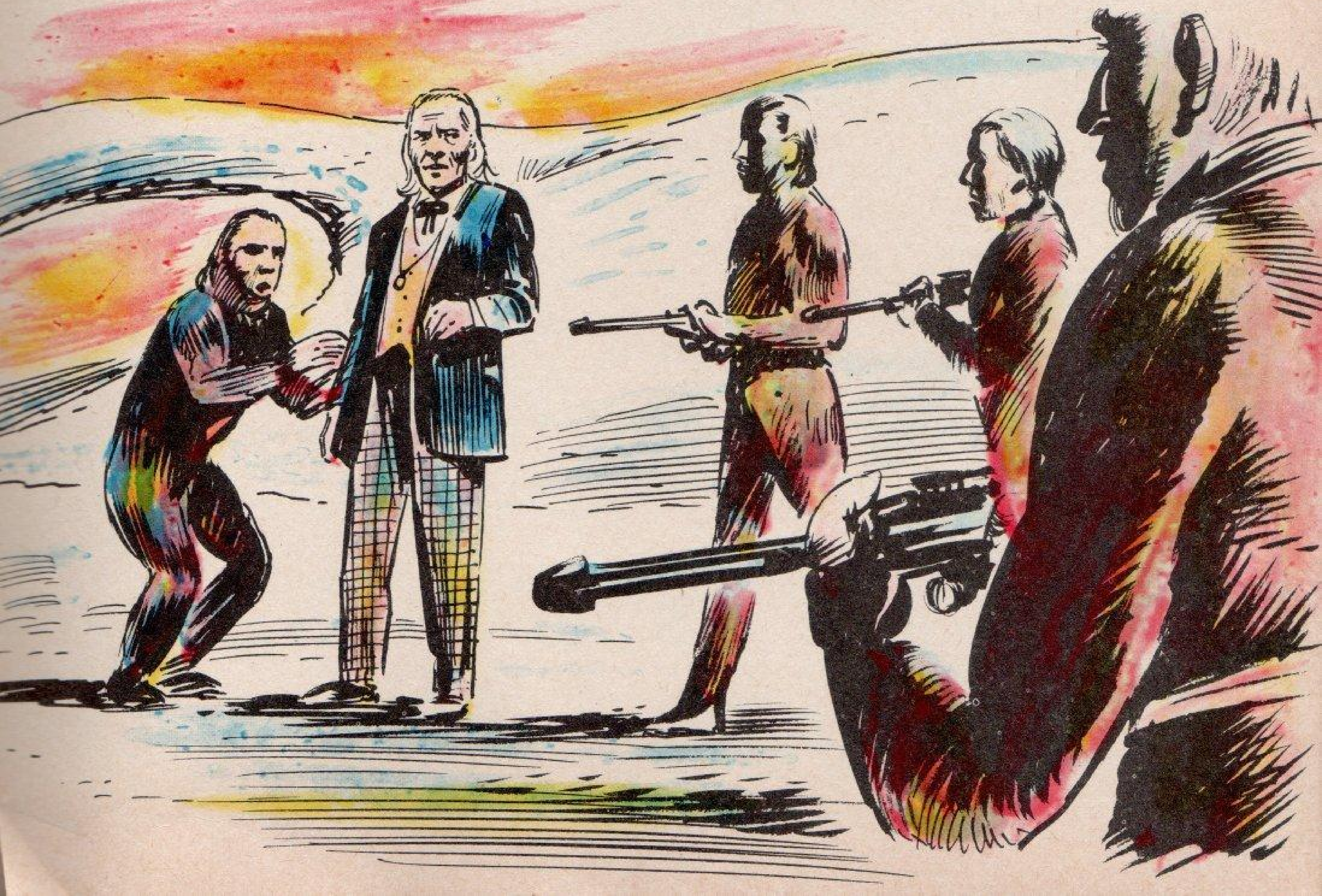
"I assure you that I had not!" began Dr Who. He was waved to silence by a huge hairy paw.

"Enough, Stranger! You will return with us to the City Under the Ice. There you will speak the truth to Rraprro!"

At this, the three other Glacian police threw back their heads and howled: "The Wise One!"

Their leader shifted his gun-sling tighter around his hairy shoulders, and waved a paw upwards. "March! Both keep close together! And remember, our guns are trained on you."

In grim silence they crossed the glacier and began to toil up the steep snow-slope.



Grahm knew the way. He led Dr Who over the peak and down the other side. In this bewildering world of featureless snow, he picked his way without hesitation among the mighty ice-caps and knife-edged arêtes.

At last Dr Who found himself walking on an almost level stretch of snow. They were marching directly towards a wall of ice. When they reached it, Grahm stopped and waited.

The leader of the Police Patrol shuffled forward. Reaching up to a massive icicle which hung from the glittering barrier, he twisted it: first to the right, then to the left. Dr Who's quick brain made a note of the combination he used.

As the Glacian stepped back there was a grating sound and a section of the ice-face slid aside. Beyond blazed the lights of the City Under the Ice.

As they marched down a ramp into the main street Dr Who gazed around with wonder and admiration. The buildings were made of a metal that glowed in ever-changing hues. They varied in size, some tall and spherical, others squat and square or cuboid.

The streets were full of Glacians, busy about their everyday duties. But the sight of Dr Who being marched along by the police attracted a lot of attention.

"In here!" The leader of the patrol gestured to a palatial doorway, which was guarded by two giant Glacians. As Dr Who entered, he saw that the building was of splendid proportions and enriched with strange, but attractive, ornaments of a metal that changed its colour constantly.

They entered a spacious hall. At one end, on a raised dais, sat a thin-faced Glacian whose furry body was covered with a golden robe. . . .

This, thought Dr Who, must be Rraprro. He felt, rather than saw, Grahm stiffen with hatred by his side.

Rraprro stared down coldly. Dr Who returned his steady gaze with no trace of fear, waiting for the 'Wise One' to speak.

At last, in a thin hard tone, Rraprro intoned: "For your crime, Grahm, you shall suffer death by icicles! But first you will tell me what this weird creature has to do with the theft of the thought-cube."

Before Grahm could reply, Dr Who said testily: "If you don't mind, sir, I am *not* a weird creature. I have just arrived on your planet in my—er—space-ship. And as I have already informed your police officer, I have nothing at all to do with any thought-cube."

Rraprro looked at him for a few moments in silence. "Where is this space-ship?" he demanded.

Dr Who shrugged. "There was a crevasse in a glacier—your policemen will explain the location. And my ship is on top of the peak—on the other side of the crevasse."

Rraprro glanced briefly at the bulky police leader. "Go and see if he speaks the truth."

The other Glacian shifted uneasily on his cumbersome feet. "O Wise One!" he growled, "we cannot!"

The figure in the gold robe stiffened. "Cannot?"

"The snow-bridge. . . . We had to destroy it to stop the prisoners from escaping."

Rraprro leaned forward, his eyes glittering. "Then you will return to the glacier, fool! You will rebuild the snow-bridge, and bring me news whether this creature's ship is there—by the third sun!"

The police leader raised a paw in appeal. "But—but how can we build it in that time, O Wise One?" he howled.

Rraprro dismissed him with a bear-like snarl. "Go! Do as I command—or pay the penalty!"

When the police party had gone, Rraprro motioned to his guards. "Take these two away!" he ordered.

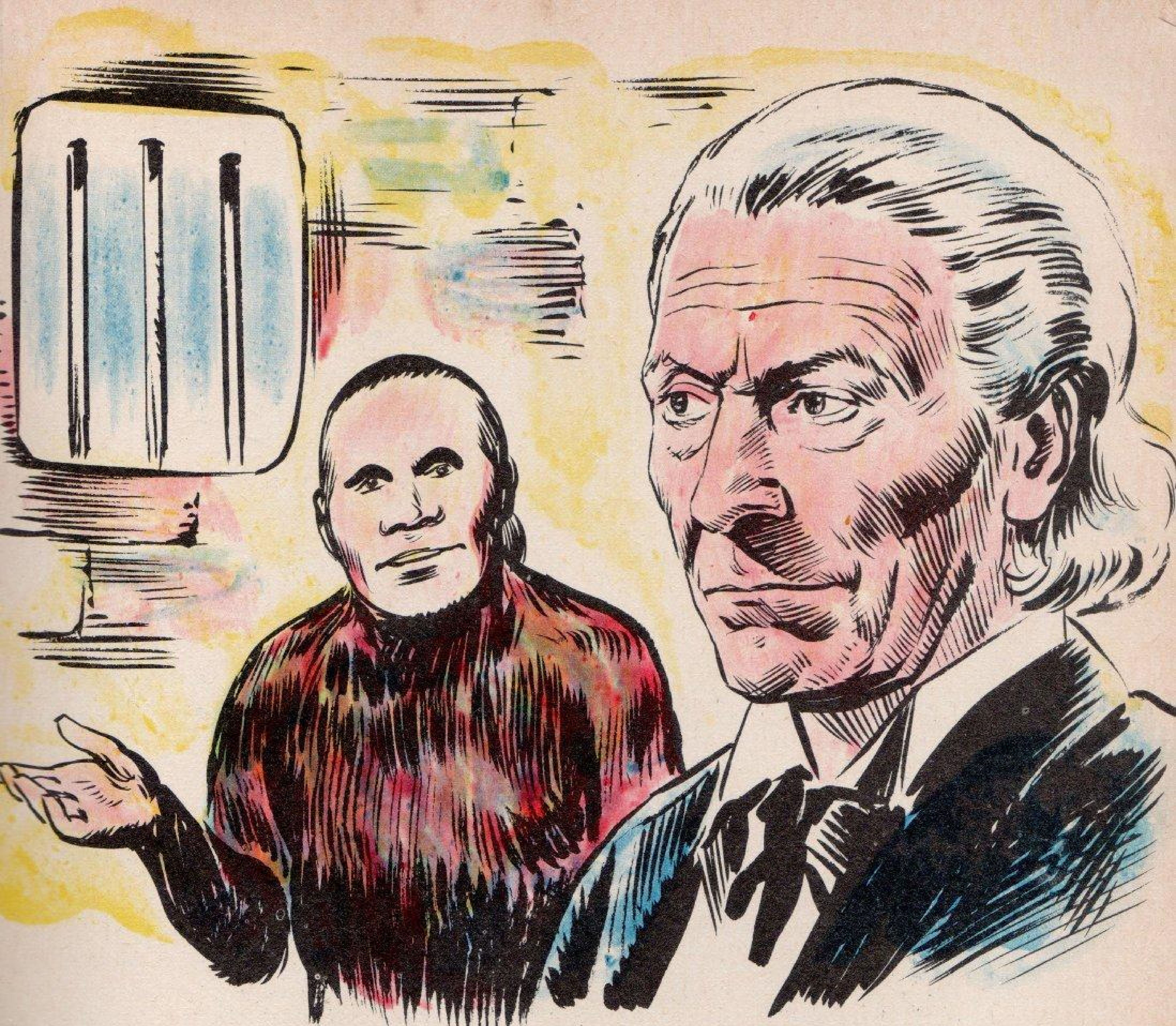
Dr Who and Grahm were hustled from the great chamber and thrust into a small cell. The guards went away, locking the door.

Dr Who made himself comfortable on a low bench covered with furs.

"Well, my friend," he said, "since we are to be fellow-prisoners for a while, perhaps you would explain to me exactly what it is you are accused of? What is the missing thought-cube like?"

Grahm sat down slowly. "The thought-cube? It is not large." He held out a huge paw, palm upwards. "I could fit one in my hand—so! Each cube contains not print but a telepathic impression. . . . They are the Zilgors's equivalent of books."

Dr Who frowned and waved an impatient hand. "Now wait a moment! Not so fast! Who are the Zilgors?"



Grahm looked at his companion with sad eyes. "The Zilgors came here to Bruhl a long time ago. There were just six of them—creatures of a planet far in advance of ours. They brought us peace, taught us how to develop our planet, and heaped upon us the riches of their vast knowledge."

Dr Who nodded. "Where are these Zilgors now?"

Grahm lifted his heavy shoulders. "They vanished. . . . One morning we awoke, and they had gone. They left no message. . . . Some say they had returned to their own planet—but I do not know! All I know is that Rraprro was sitting on the throne, saying that the Zilgors had installed him as ruler of Bruhl before they left."

Dr Who leaned back against the cell wall, drumming his fingers on his knees. "Hm! Most extraordinary!" he murmured. "But tell me about the thought-cubes. Where are they kept?"

"In a room not far from here there are endless rows of them packed on shelves. This room was the library of the Zilgors, who are a telepathic race," said Grahm. "We Glacians do not understand how to use thought-cubes."

Dr Who sat up, frowning. "Then if you cannot use them, why would anyone steal one?" he demanded.

Grahm nodded. "Why, indeed? . . . But Rraprro is afraid of something. I am sure of it. He is suspicious that one day we Glacians will rise up and rebel against his tyrannies. . . . That is why he will put me to death."

Dr Who rose to his feet. "You are not dead yet, that is the main thing, my dear Grahm. . . . now if we could only escape from this place. . . ."

He broke off, then whirled around to stare at the wall behind the bench. From somewhere beyond the wall came a low humming sound.

Grahm had heard the noise too, and was backing slowly away towards the door.

The whirring became louder, and took on a grating note. The next moment a section of the metal wall glowed white with heat—then melted and ran on to the floor.

Through the hole in the wall, a round-shouldered Glacian stepped. He beckoned to the prisoners. "Come! I am here to help you to escape!"

Dr Who bowed: "You have arrived at a very opportune moment, my friend."

He moved towards the jagged hole. Grahm followed him more hesitantly. Their rescuer placed a small phial behind the cell door, and hurried after them.

The escape route had been cut through the wall of an adjoining room. There were other Glacians waiting.

The round-shouldered Glacian rubbed his paws in a self-satisfied gesture. "I have planted our little surprise behind the door," he growled. "It will explode as soon as Rraprro's guards enter. . . . Come! We must get clear of the palace."

They left the building by a rear door and tumbled into a waiting vehicle, spherical in shape, which whizzed them away.

Dr Who glanced at his rescuer, sitting beside him. "And who have I the pleasure to thank for such a timely rescue?" he enquired.

The Glacian smiled thinly. "I am the scientist Ffreuf. I am the one who has stolen the thought-cube."

Grahm leaned forward in his seat, staring. "You? But why?"

"Because I and my companions are seeking a way in which to overthrow the tyrant Rraprro!" rasped Ffreuf. "I believe that the thought-cube contains information which will give us the real reason why the Zilgors left our planet."

Grahm grunted eagerly: "Ah! Then you have discovered how to use the thought-cube?"

Ffreuf shook his shaggy head. "No. I have sought the answer for months in a secret laboratory. But I am still baffled. . . . That is why we broke into the palace to rescue you, Doctor." The Glacian made a brief, respectful bow in his direction. "We hope you may be able to solve the mystery for us."

The flattery was not lost on Dr Who. He brushed back his mane of silver hair, and smoothed the lapels of his frock-coat with a smug smile. "Possibly, my dear Ffreuf! Yes, quite possibly I can help! I have had some experience with thought-cubes. Let me see, was it on the planet Augos or the planet Bluttos. . . ?"

As he frowned thoughtfully out of the window the Glacians exchanged glances in which wonder mingled with fear. This strange visitor, who spoke so glibly of planets they had never heard of, filled them with doubts of the Unknown.

The journey ended in a remote corner of the City Under the Ice. The party hurried into a building. Inside were other Glacian rebels, manning armed look-out posts.

"This way, please, Doctor!" said Ffreuf.

He led the way into a laboratory packed with humming machinery and gleaming control-panels. The Glacian scientist waved a hairy paw about him. "This machinery was left by the Zilgors when they disappeared," he said. "Much of it is a mystery to me. . . . Come! I will show you the thought-cube."

He padded on soft feet to a table in the centre of the room. There, on a metal plate, lay a small green cube which appeared to be made of an opaque jelloid substance.

Dr Who leaned on the table and examined the cube.

"Ah yes! Amazing!" he murmured. "Your friends the Zilgors must, indeed, be a race of highly-advanced intellects. . . . However, we had better find out what the cube has to tell us, eh?"

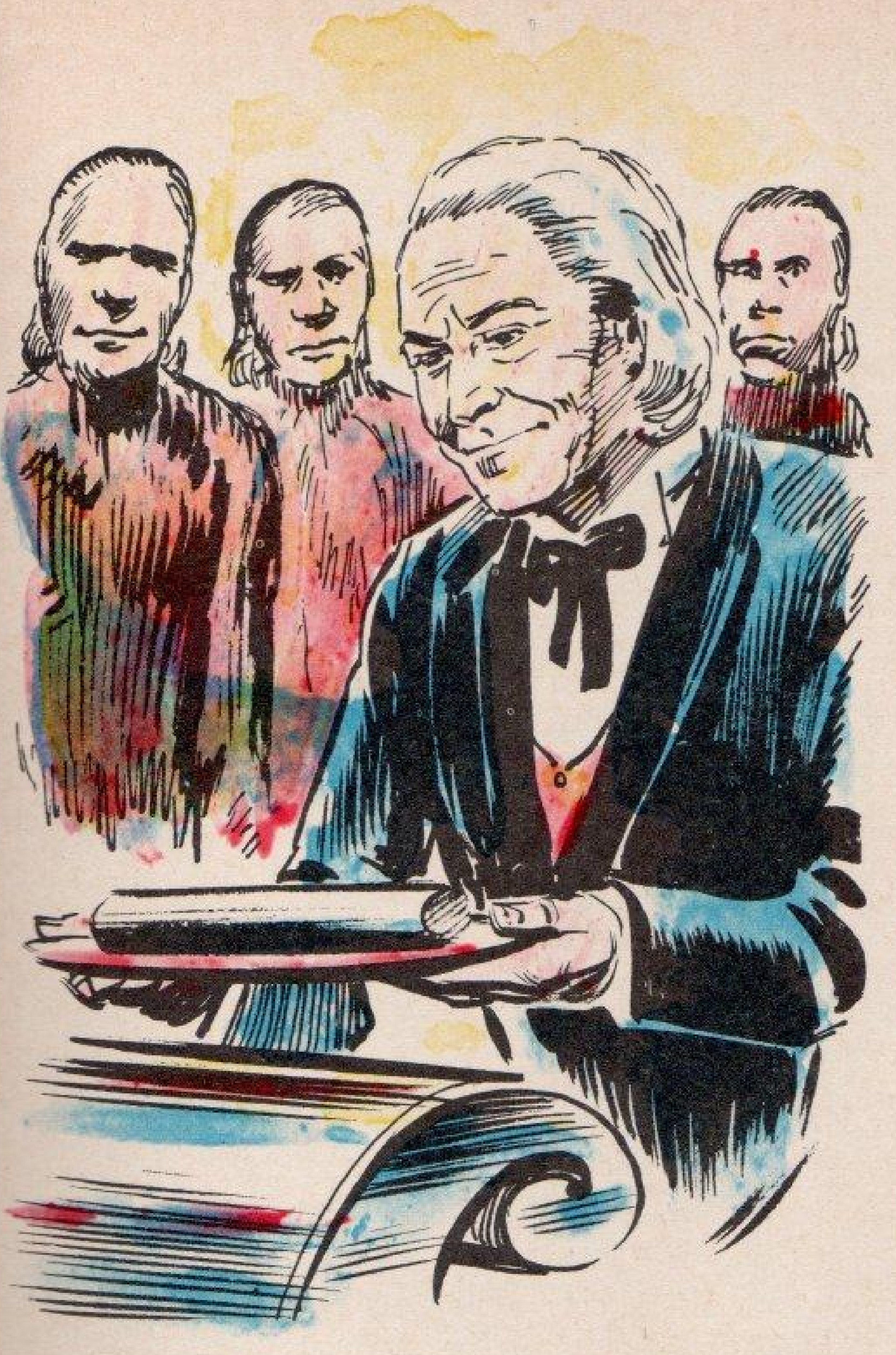
Ffreuf stared in amazement. "You know how to use the thought-cube?"

"I think so," said Dr Who blandly. He glanced around him. "Did the Zilgors leave behind anything like a couch?"

Again Ffreuf gaped. "A couch?"

Dr Who waved his hand testily. "Yes, yes! You know—something to lie on!"

The scientist swallowed his bewilderment. "Well . . . now you mention it, there *is* an old couch which the Zilgors left. We—er—threw it away somewhere!"



"Threw it away! But my dear fellow, that may mean you can never unlock the secret of this thought-cube!" exclaimed Dr Who.

Ffreuf shuffled in agitation. "Then we must find it!" he growled, and rapped out a command.

The rest of the rebel Glacians began to scurry around in a near-panic.

Suddenly there was a howl of triumph from another part of the building. The noise was taken up on all sides, until it became a deafening howl.

Dr Who put his hands to his ears, and was grimacing with annoyance when Ffreuf re-entered the laboratory followed by a group of Glacians carrying a couch. It was severely simple in style, and made of a glassy substance.

"This is the couch left by the Zilgors," said the scientist. "But I still do not understand how it can be used. It has no wires—nothing by which it can be connected to these Zilgor machines."

Dr Who smiled indulgently. "Of course it hasn't, my friend. It is a telepathic couch and needs no wires. . . . Now, if you will just set it down in the centre of the room, I will try and show you what I mean."

As the Glacians were setting down the couch Dr Who went to the table and fetched the thought-cube, carrying it with great care on the metal plate. He set it down on a ledge at the head of the couch.

"Now, my friends, I am going to lie down—and I shall appear to go to sleep," he said. "I shall, in fact, be concentrating deeply so that I may reach, by telepathy, the message within the cube. You will all remain still and silent until I open my eyes again. Is that clear?"

An intense hush had already fallen upon the Glacians. Now they merely nodded.

Dr Who lay upon the couch of the Zilgors. He closed his eyes. Intense concentration ploughed deep furrows across his high forehead. His lips twitched and appeared to form a word . . . then another. . . .

For a few moments he appeared to have stopped breathing. Then his pent-up breath was released in a long sigh.

Dr Who opened his eyes and sat up. He took out his handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"Oh dear! I'm afraid I am a little out of practice at telepathy!" he said. "Very exhausting. . . . But very interesting!"

"You were successful?" whispered Ffreuf hoarsely.

"Yes, of course. The contents of the cube began to flow quite freely after a while." Dr Who rose to his feet, tucking his handkerchief into his pocket. "And I have a surprise for you, my dear Ffreuf! Your friends the Zilgors have not left this planet!"

Startled gasps burst from every side. The Glacians pressed forward to hear more, forming a solid ring of furry bodies around their visitor.

"The Zilgors are still here?" demanded Ffreuf incredulously.

"Oh yes, indeed!" Dr Who pressed the tips of his long slim fingers together. "They managed to leave that thought-cube just before Rraprro entombed them in a block of ice."

A low snarl of rage greeted this news.

Dr Who held up a hand. "The Zilgors say they have gone into a self-induced trance, in order that they may survive the sub-zero temperatures with which Rraprro is trying to kill them."

"Then they are still alive?" cried Ffreuf.

Dr Who nodded. "Yes, my friend. And they heard Rraprro planning to hide the block of ice containing their bodies in a cavern called Mura Six."

The Glacian's eyes blazed with a fierce light. "This is wonderful news!" he cried. Whirling, he raised his arms. "We march to Mura Six to rescue the Zilgors!" he howled. "Cut down anyone who would stand in our way. The time to overthrow Rraprro has come!"

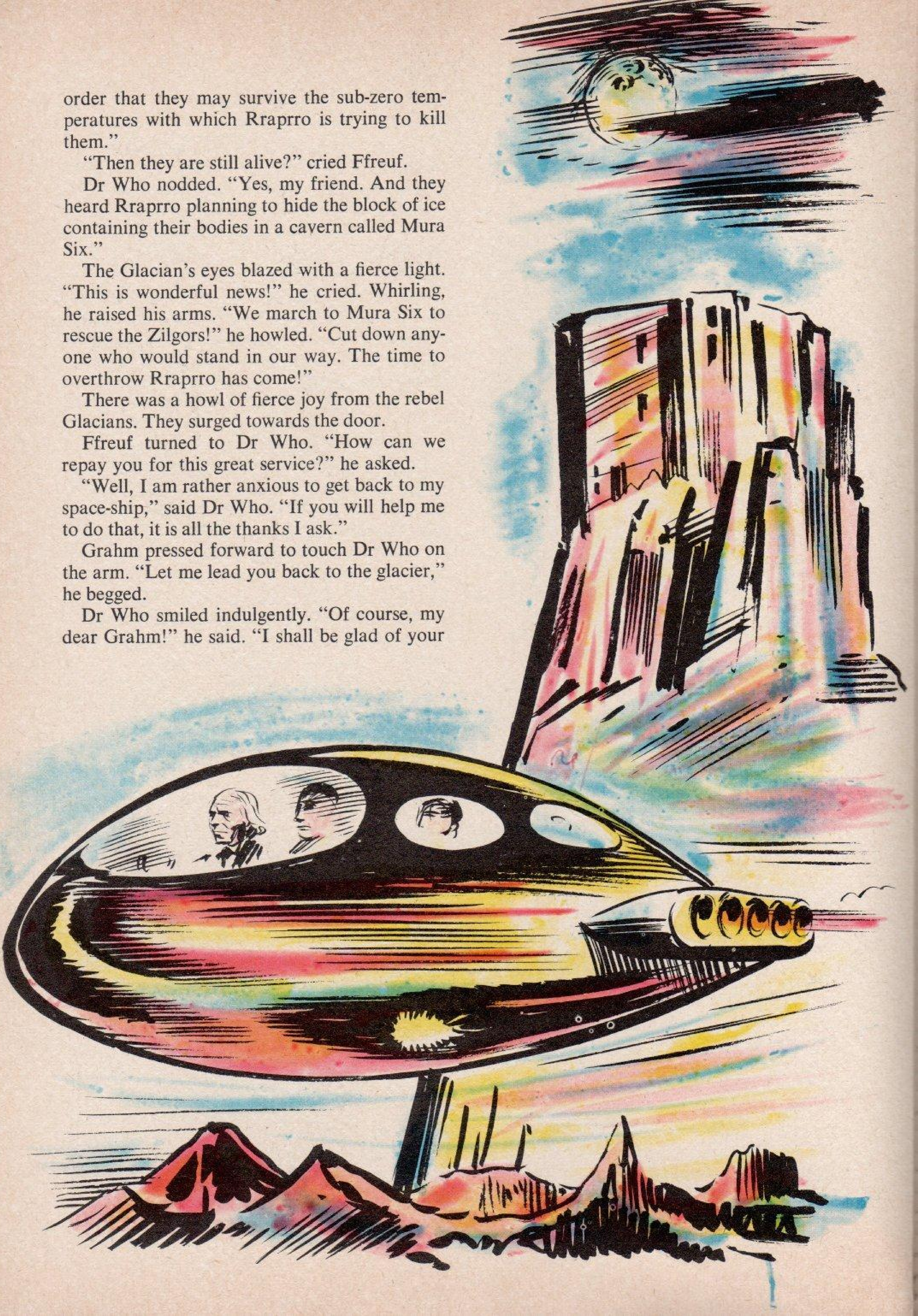
There was a howl of fierce joy from the rebel Glacians. They surged towards the door.

Ffreuf turned to Dr Who. "How can we repay you for this great service?" he asked.

"Well, I am rather anxious to get back to my space-ship," said Dr Who. "If you will help me to do that, it is all the thanks I ask."

Grahm pressed forward to touch Dr Who on the arm. "Let me lead you back to the glacier," he begged.

Dr Who smiled indulgently. "Of course, my dear Grahm!" he said. "I shall be glad of your



company. . . . But I think we had better have some armed support, eh?"

Ffreuf frowned. "You fear some danger?"

Dr Who nodded. "You see, Rraprro has sent the Glacian Planet Police to rebuild the snow-bridge," he explained.

Ffreuf turned to one of the control panels. He touched a switch and spoke into a microphone. Then turning back to Dr Who he said: "An armed scout car is waiting outside, Doctor. You must go quickly now. The police may have rebuilt the snow bridge and crossed the glacier to capture your ship."

With the thanks of the Glacian scientist ringing in his ears Dr Who hurried from the building. He and Grahm climbed aboard one of the spherical vehicles, which whirled away. They left the City Under the Ice by an apparently secret exit which immediately closed behind them.

From the oval-shaped window beside his seat Dr Who looked once more over the grim, desolate landscape of the planet Bruhl. The craft moved at a steady speed over the snowy waste.

Grahm sat close to the driver, and directed him without a moment's hesitation. At length he tapped the driver on the arm, and said: "We had better go on foot from here. The vehicle would only warn the others of our coming."

Five minutes later Dr Who was plodding through the snow, with Grahm at his side, and the armed Glacian rebels spread out behind them.

When they came in sight of the glacier, Dr Who gave a pleased exclamation. "Look! The snow-bridge is rebuilt! Ah good! I shall have no trouble returning to my *Tardis*."

Grahm slowed down. He appeared uneasy. "Where are the Planet Police?" he growled. "There is no sign of them. . . . I do not like it. They may be lying in wait for us!"

Dr Who shrugged. "There is only one way to find out, eh? We must press on!" He suited his actions to his words.

The Glacians followed as he strode briskly towards the bridge. But they walked tensely, their fingers crooked around their ray guns.

In single file they crossed the snow-bridge. Dr Who's Zero Boots rang on the ice as he reached the other side and began to climb back to where he had left *Tardis*.

After climbing for a while, he stopped and pointed. "Ah, there it is! There's my ship!" he panted.

Tardis, still in the shape of a blue police telephone-box, was a hundred yards away, and windblown snow had piled up drifts as high as the windows.

Dr Who smiled at Grahm and the other Glacians. "Well, my friends! Thank you for escorting me here!" he said. "Now I shall say good-bye—and wish you a more peaceful and happy rule with the return of the Zilgors. Good-bye!"

He turned and began to climb the last snow slope. Then, somewhere to the right, he caught the flicker of greenish light from a ray gun. He flung himself flat.

When he dared to raise his head, it was to find the sky dancing with the weird lights of those dreadful squat weapons.

The Planet Police, apparently returning from a fruitless hunt for Dr Who's space-ship, had begun to charge down upon him. They paid dearly for their lack of caution. The Glacian rebels began to return their fire with deadly effect.

Dr Who scrambled on hands and knees up the slope. When he reached the level, he rose to his feet and hurried to *Tardis*. As he began to scrape snow away so that he could unlock the door with his electronic key, a ray tore into a snow-bank close beside him, exploding the snow mass into a miniature blizzard.

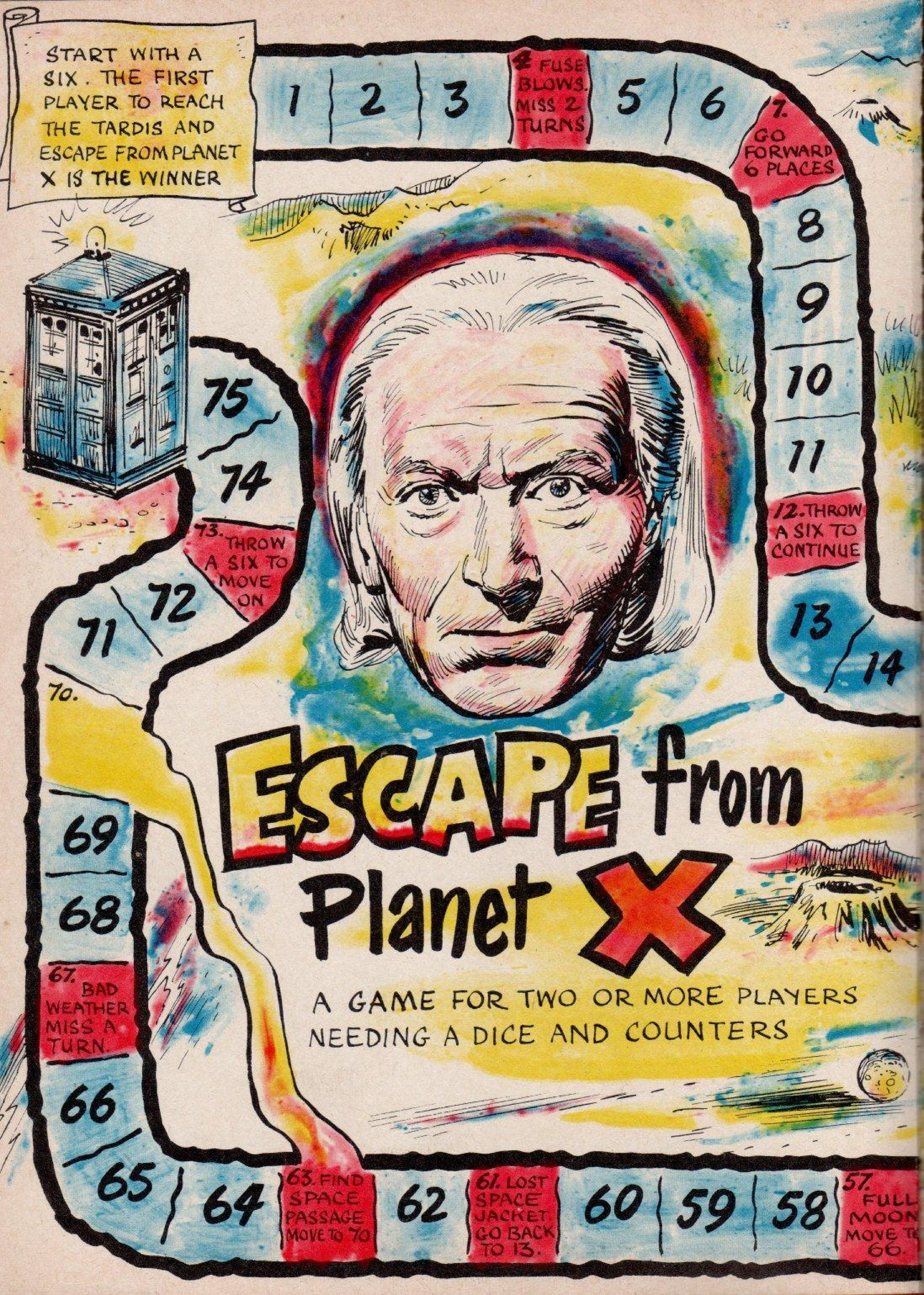
Desperately Dr Who scrabbled away at the drift. Finally he was able to unlock the door.

He flung himself into *Tardis*. Panting and almost exhausted, he leaned on the control panel and switched on the sight-screen. What he saw made him smile with satisfaction. For Rraprro's men were in full flight across the glacier, with the Glacian rebels in pursuit, led by Grahm.

Wearily Dr Who wiped his face with his handkerchief and prepared to set in motion the electronic processes for his departure.

"Dear me!" he said aloud as he did so. "One of these days I really must invent a device that will be able to think ahead and warn me of strenuous adventures like this."

He chuckled as he slammed home the levers. "It could be a kind of thought-cube," he mused. "Or should I say a 'forethought-cube'!"



ESCAPE from Planet X

A GAME FOR TWO OR MORE PLAYERS NEEDING A DICE AND COUNTERS

START WITH A SIX. THE FIRST PLAYER TO REACH THE TARDIS AND ESCAPE FROM PLANET X IS THE WINNER

1
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4 FUSE BLOWS. MISS 2 TURNS
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7. GO FORWARD 6 PLACES
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12. THROW A SIX TO CONTINUE
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57. FULL MOON MOVE T 66.
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61. LOST SPACE JACKET GO BACK TO 13.
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63. FIND SPACE PASSAGE MOVE TO 70
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67. BAD WEATHER MISS A TURN.
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73. THROW A SIX TO MOVE ON
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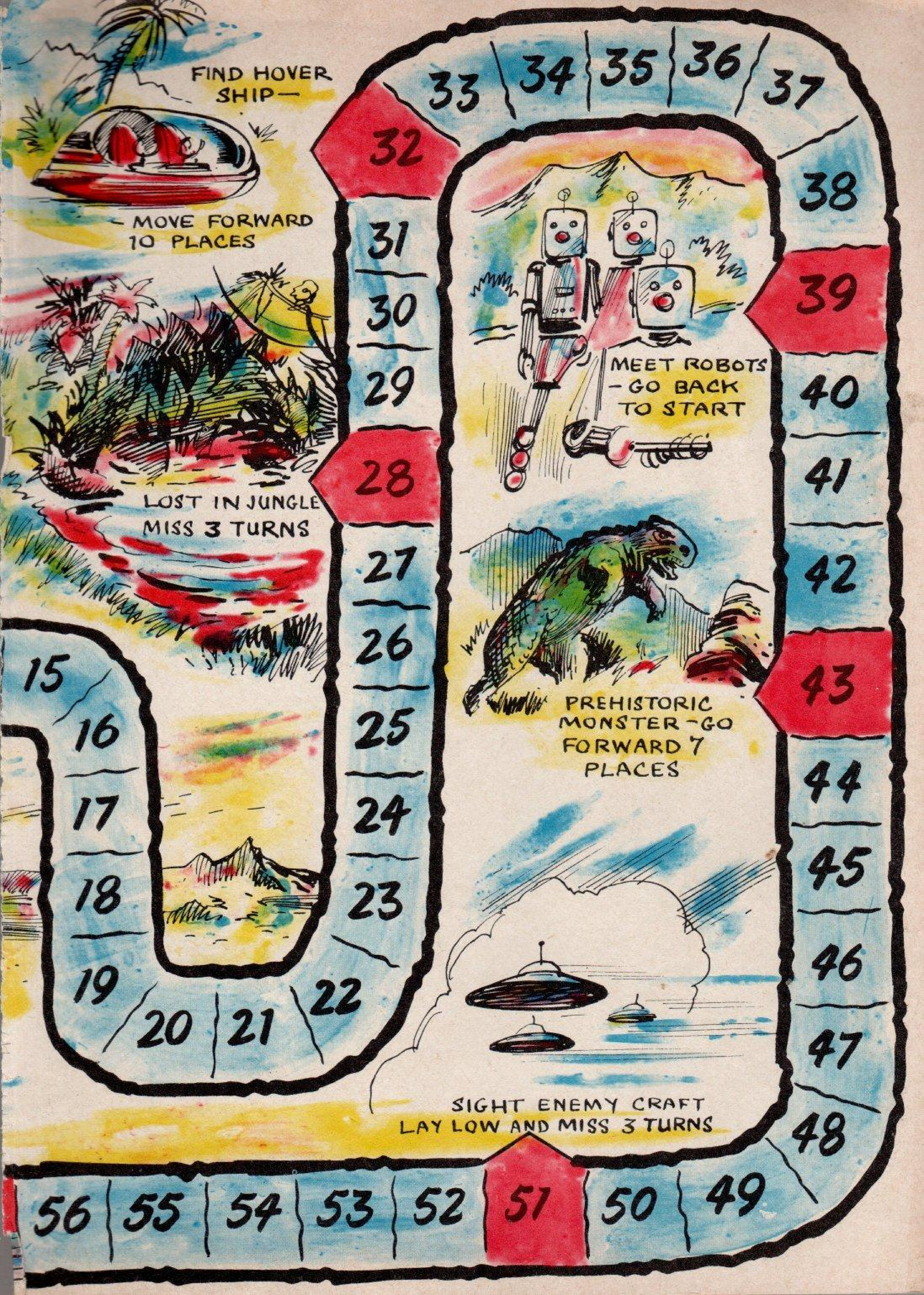
FIND HOVER SHIP—
—MOVE FORWARD 10 PLACES
LOST IN JUNGLE MISS 3 TURNS
MEET ROBOTS -GO BACK TO START
PREHISTORIC MONSTER-GO FORWARD 7 PLACES
SIGHT ENEMY CRAFT LAY LOW AND MISS 3 TURNS
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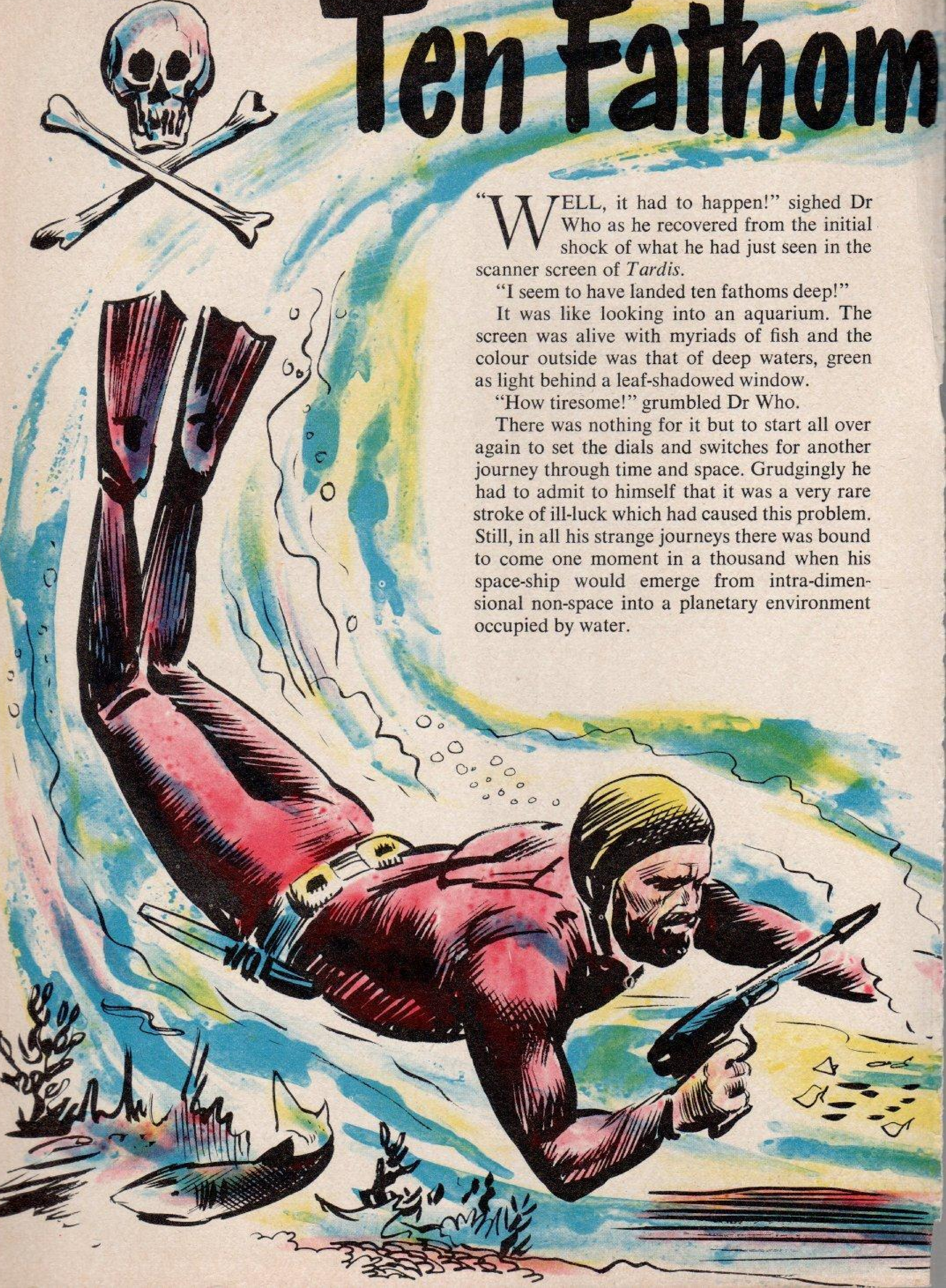
Ten Fathom



“WELL, it had to happen!” sighed Dr Who as he recovered from the initial shock of what he had just seen in the scanner screen of *Tardis*.

“I seem to have landed ten fathoms deep!”

It was like looking into an aquarium. The screen was alive with myriads of fish and the colour outside was that of deep waters, green as light behind a leaf-shadowed window.

“How tiresome!” grumbled Dr Who.

There was nothing for it but to start all over again to set the dials and switches for another journey through time and space. Grudgingly he had to admit to himself that it was a very rare stroke of ill-luck which had caused this problem. Still, in all his strange journeys there was bound to come one moment in a thousand when his space-ship would emerge from intra-dimensional non-space into a planetary environment occupied by water.

PIRATES

There was a wild flurry among the fish outside, and a moment later every single one had vanished.

Mildly intrigued, Dr Who stopped fingering the dials on his circular control panel and watched to see the cause of the panic outside. An enormous lobster-like creature lumbered into view. Its humped shell was quartered in red and blue, and it carried its fighting claws in readiness for attack.

For a few moments Dr Who thought the creature was out to attack *Tardis*. Before he could move the lobster's armoured bulk was filling the whole scanner lens. The next moment *Tardis* rocked alarmingly as the creature slithered over it.

Dr Who was tumbled to the floor, and he could hear the harsh scraping of the lobster's shell and claws against the outside of *Tardis*.

He got to his feet and clung to a guard rail, tensely awaiting a fresh assault. But it did not come.

Dr Who's gaze moved to his view-screen again—and what he saw made him stare with open-eyed wonder. . . . Swimming towards him were a group of men!

For a fleeting moment he wondered if they were fishermen. But he rejected the thought as he recalled the true fishermen, such as those he had encountered on the planet Kandalinga. Those beings had resembled men in some respects, but had been covered with scales, and their lower limbs were webbed.

The beings now swimming towards *Tardis* were unmistakably men such as Dr Who himself. True, they were garishly attired in rubber suits of multi-colours, but their faces were uncovered and he could see the features of hard-bitten men of action.

Their leader spotted *Tardis* and held up a hand. The others came to an immediate halt, deploying themselves in a battle position that spoke of well-drilled precision.

It was then that Dr Who noticed that each man was bristling with weapons. He recognised vibratory rifles and sonic hand pistols. But there were other weapons, which looked almost like primitive knives or cutlasses, thrust into their belts.

The leader, a powerfully-built man with a black moustache, twisted round to give an order to his men. As he did so Dr Who saw, crudely emblazoned on the back of his rubber suit, a skull and cross bones.

It was an insignia which did not register immediately in his brain. He knew that he had met with it before, on a journey to Earth. But why did he feel a wave of panic at the sight of it. . . .

As his mind fumbled towards the answer, his hands were busy setting the controls for an immediate getaway. He was working with frantic haste, one eye on the scanner screen.

The men had fanned out now, obviously surrounding *Tardis*, and they were behaving in a manner which puzzled and disturbed Dr Who. Moving with incredible speed—their frog-like flippers almost a blur in the water—the men appeared to be reeling out some sort of net from black boxes slung high on their shoulders. The strands of the net—if it was a net—were so fine as to be invisible to the scanner's lens.

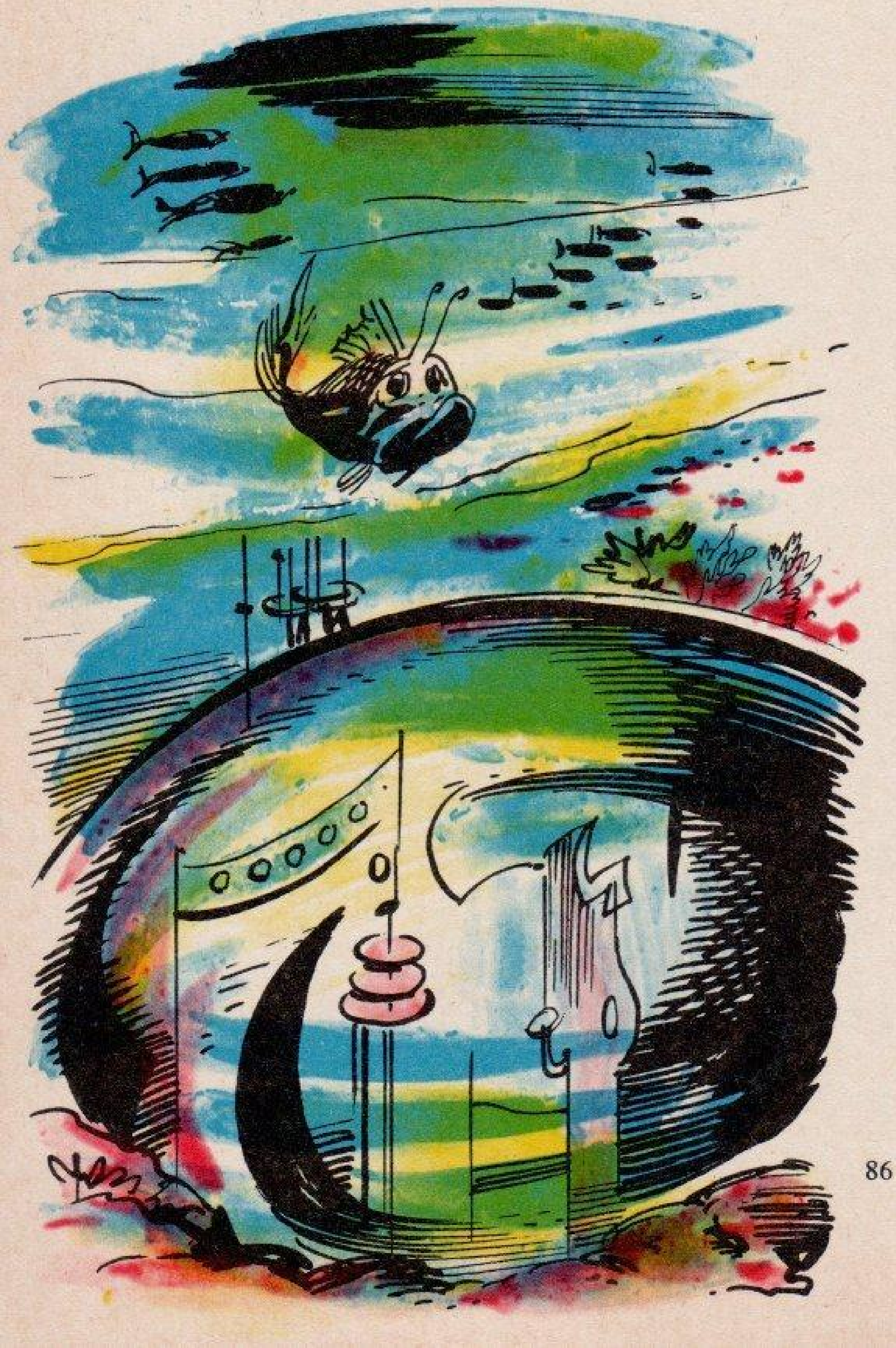
Dr Who was about to throw the last switch, the one that would cause the blue police phone-box to melt before their eyes, when—like a blinding flash—the meaning of the skull and cross bones leapt to his mind. It was the bold insignia of pirates!

Certain now that he was dealing with lawless men who sought to trap him, Dr Who threw the switch.

The next moment he staggered back. His gleaming control panel erupted in a fountain of sparks. Acrid smoke billowed out, causing him to cough and choke. The winking light-bulbs which signalled the workings of the many intricate parts of *Tardis* began to blink crazily.

Dr Who covered his mouth with his handkerchief and struggled back to the controls. With feverish haste he restored the switches to normal. Immediately the sparks ceased to fly.

He stared up at his scanner screen. It had gone out of order—showing only a wild zig-zag of white lines.



Dr Who began to realise what must have happened. The men outside had indeed caught *Tardis* in a net, some form of force-barrier net or one that emitted charged particles.

"Well, there seems to be nothing I can do but wait for the pirates to take action," said Dr Who. "I certainly do not intend to step outside and try breathing under water as they can apparently do."

The seconds ticked by. He prowled around inside the space-ship impatiently. Suddenly there was a lurch which almost sent him sprawling again. Then he realised from the gentle swaying motion that *Tardis* was moving. . . . He was being towed away!

He switched on the scanner again. This time the screen showed an off-angle view, first of the ocean bottom and then of the sea itself. The up-and-down motion of this picture made Dr Who feel somewhat queasy. But he could catch glimpses of the pirates, swimming in groups above. They appeared to be swimming only with great effort, straining to pull on ropes that were invisible to Dr Who's eyes. He guessed that they must be towing him along in the net with which they had neutralised his instruments.

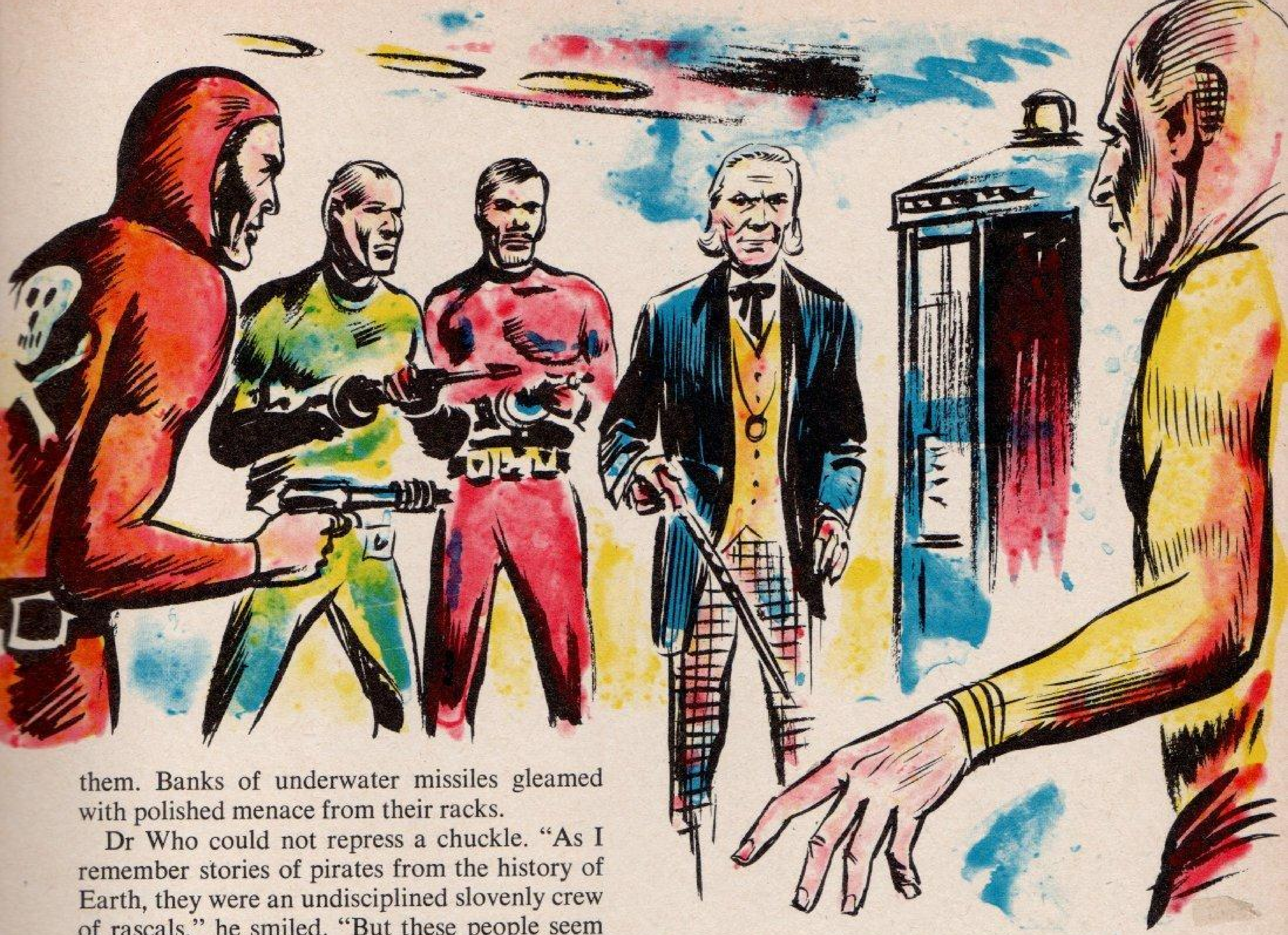
Tardis shifted position again, and now he could see they were approaching a huge camouflaged dome. It looked at first like a dormant giant whale, but it loomed larger and larger and Dr Who could make out the jutting outlines of radio-masts and electronic underwater equipment.

Suddenly he saw that a square section of the dome, close to its base, was sliding to one side. The swimmers drew together, striking out for the dark entrance to a tunnel.

Tardis took a roll. Dr Who clung on desperately to the guard-rail. There was a series of sharp movements . . . then all was still.

Dr Who turned panting towards the screen. Now he could see that *Tardis* was inside what must surely be the underwater lair of the pirates. An electric grab had plucked the ship from the entrance tank and set it down on a wide transporter-belt. With a jerk the belt came to life, moving the time-space ship slowly upwards into the upper regions of the dome.

Everything gave the impression of being stripped-down and ready for immediate action. Squat scooter-craft were lined up ready for launching, with mechanics working on some of



them. Banks of underwater missiles gleamed with polished menace from their racks.

Dr Who could not repress a chuckle. "As I remember stories of pirates from the history of Earth, they were an undisciplined slovenly crew of rascals," he smiled. "But these people seem to be quite the opposite."

The upward motion of *Tardis* ceased. The conveyor belt levelled off and moved into a room which was obviously the nerve-centre of the pirate lair. *Tardis* came to rest before a wide, low metal desk of horse-shoe design. Behind it sat three men. One was small and round, with podgy hands that continually fluttered to his face as if to hide the awful scar on one cheek. The second was a thin-faced serpent of a man, with restless eyes. But the most striking of the trio was a magnificent specimen, tall and graceful, dressed in a flamboyant one-piece costume of gold-leaf, and with one half of his left ear shot away.

"The pirate chief himself!" murmured Dr Who. "Well, I had better go out and make his acquaintance!"

He switched off the screen. A quick check of his instruments proved satisfactory. Dr Who picked up his cane and went out through the great door.

His sudden appearance caused some wild confusion. The three at the table scrambled to their feet. There were fierce cries, as guards sprang forward from various parts of the room. In a twinkling he was the target for a dozen menacing weapons.

"I am quite unarmed, gentlemen," cried Dr Who.

There was a moment of surprised silence.

Then the tall leader said in a thin voice: "How do we know?"

Dr Who offered him a smile, but it fell on stony ground. "Well, since you seem to have—er—netted my ship, I am hardly in any position to offer resistance, am I, eh?"

The man in gold came round the table. He moved with a grace and poise that Dr Who could not help admiring, but on closer inspection there was a cruel set to his lips and his eyes were like ice-blue chips.

This, Dr Who told himself with certainty, must definitely be the pirate chief.

The man walked slowly around *Tardis*. Nobody uttered a sound.

Dr Who was now able to observe that he, like all his followers, had gilled openings at the back of the ears. It explained why these men were able to live and breathe without masks in the water, for they had been adapted—either by evolution or by surgery—for life below the sea. Probably, thought Dr Who, they also had salt water in their veins.

The Pirate Chief had finished his inspection of the unusual 'loot' which his men had brought back. There was a mirthless smile on his face now.

"This is your space-ship?" he drawled, standing directly in front of his prisoner.

Dr Who sighed inwardly. It was his recurring problem how to explain that this simple-looking wooden box, with its flashing blue lamp on top, was in reality a craft which, resolved into a looser pattern of atoms and electrons, could be transferred instantaneously to any point in space and any moment in time.

Lamely he said: "I am a traveller—in space and time. . . . My *Tardis* happened to materialise at the bottom of the sea, and your men apparently mistook it for some sort of treasure-chest."

There was a brief silence. Then a low chuckle broke from the lips of the Pirate Chief. It was taken up by his henchmen, and then by the guards, until it had swelled into a roar of derisive laughter.

"Ho!" spluttered the little fat man. "Treasure indeed! Well, let's see what's in the box, eh?"

Dr Who made a quick decision. If these ruthless men once discovered the secrets that lay within *Tardis,* he might count his own life of little worth. At all costs he must keep them guessing.

He took a brisk step towards his craft. "Very well! Let me show you around!" he said.

The instant his back was towards the pirates, he slipped his electronic key into the lock. So that while he appeared to be struggling to open the door, he was actually locking it. Inwardly he was congratulating himself for his foresight in switching on the force-field which would protect *Tardis* from rough handling.

"What's the matter? Why don't you open the door?" said the thin leader.

"Dear me! I—I can't seem to get it open," grunted Dr Who, putting on a convincing show of pushing at it.

The Pirate Chief shoved him roughly aside. Without a word he wrenched at the door. Frowning, he turned towards the guards: "Give me an axe!" he snapped.

Dr Who said mildly: "I say, it's really no use trying to break down the door. You see there is a force-field——"

"Silence!" The other cut him off swiftly. He snatched the axe which one of the pirates handed to him. It carved a silver arc over his head as he brought it down. . . .

The next moment he was dancing around, nursing his injured hands while the axe was spinning into a corner of the room.

Once more Dr Who was the target for every weapon in the room. The situation was probably the most delicate in his whole fantastic career. His very life hung on the finest of thread at this moment.

"Well, I did try to warn you about the force-field!" he pointed out.

The other's ice-blue eyes bored into him in cold fury. "I will give you just one minute to open that door!" he snarled. "One minute—or else you die!"

Dr Who shrugged. "That is impossible!" he said. "The lock is electronically operated, and apparently the tumblers have become dislodged by the shaking your men subjected my ship to when they dragged it here in their net!"

The Pirate Chief turned and walked back to his seat at the desk. Everyone relaxed. The moment of crisis was receding. The three leaders put their heads together and discussed the situation in whispers.

The Chief looked up at last. "You need tools to repair the lock?"

The words planted a fully formed plan in Dr Who's mind. "Yes. I need one special tool. Have you a Renticular Celluprime, Number Two?"

It sounded splendid, tripping off his tongue like that. But he had no more idea what it meant than had the pirates. He had made the name up on the spur of the moment.

The Pirate Chief frowned. The others shrugged, mystified.

The Chief thumbed a switch on the desk, and spoke into an invisible microphone. The answer he received did nothing to improve his temper.

He slammed the desk with his fist. "Is this some trick? My experts have never heard of such a tool."

Dr Who raised his eyebrows. His face mirrored astonishment.

"Never heard of a Renticular Celluprime? But—but—it is an essential tool for tracing the recall memory traits of any of the advanced type electronic tumbler locks, such as this one on my ship."

The frustrated pirates glowered at him. Another whispered conference followed. Then the Chief said: "You will come with us when we attack the Shore. We're going into the Secretariat building to rescue some of our men who have been captured. Up there they've got every kind of tool. We'll find the one you want."

This was a rather alarming development, unforseen by Dr Who. He began to protest: "But, see here, I don't want to be involved in one of your piratical affrays. I won't——"

"You will do whatever I say!" thundered the Chief, on his feet and pounding the table. He motioned angrily to the guards. "Take him away. Give him food. Then get a sea-scooter ready."

Dr Who was marched away to a long, low room which was obviously the mess-hall for the pirate crew. A barrel-chested man with a bald head and the skull and cross bones tattooed on his arms stood over the prisoner as he ate concentrated sea-food.

Dr Who did not relish the meal, but he forced himself to eat, for he could see that he would need all his strength to extricate himself from his present plight.

Wiping the corners of his mouth with his handkerchief, he asked his guard: "Are you allowed to tell me what the Shore is, and what is this Secretariat building we shall be—er—visiting?"

The other shrugged, and motioned towards a view-screen built into the wall. He punched a key and the screen glowed into life. Periscope TV cameras showed a bizarre coastline of bold red cliffs. Beyond them rose the sharp peaks of conical hills, blue and bleak and barren of any kind of vegetation.

"That's the Shore!" grunted the pirate. "And that's why we prefer to live down here. The landlubbers are welcome to dry land."

He punched another button, and the picture changed.

Now Dr Who was looking at an astonishing building: needle-shaped, it soared into a deep violet-hued sky. And on its very tip rose a slender column which supported a glittering globe of silver and glass or plastic.

"Secretariat building," said the pirate. "Somewhere up top there they've got Vark and Gramz and half a dozen of our men."

A bell rang. The guard switched off the screen and grabbed his gun. "March!" he commanded.

The sea-scooter was in the entrance tank, its two-man crew waiting for Dr Who to climb aboard. He stepped gingerly down into the flimsy, pear-shaped craft. As he settled into the middle seat, a shadow fell across the scooter, and he saw the Chief looking down. He had donned a rubber suit to lead his motley crew on their foray, but was easily distinguishable as their leader both by his height and by a close-fitting helmet of gold. The skull and cross bones on his chest were in gold too.

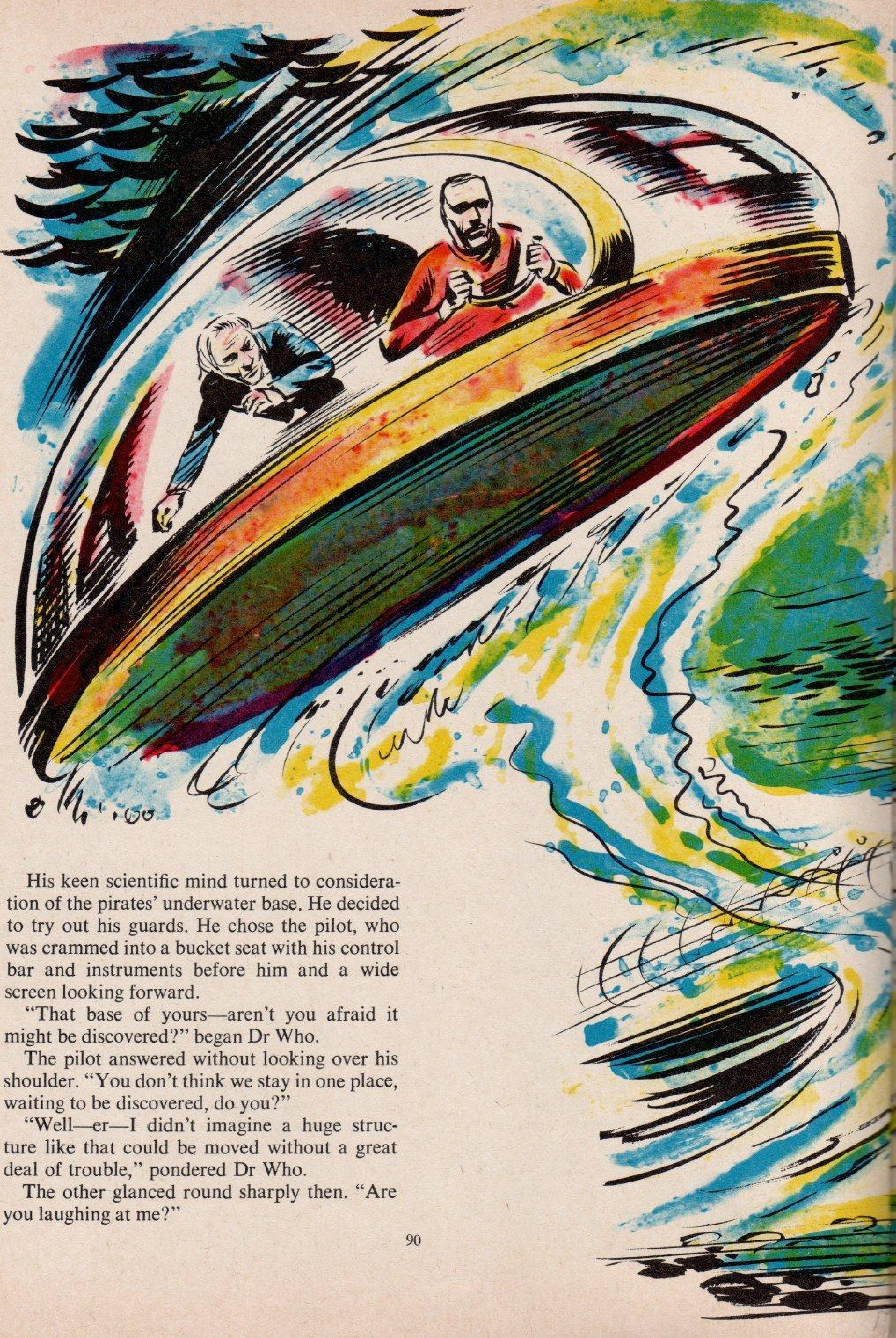
Dr Who wondered how the insignia came to be on this planet. Was it perhaps that they had sent an expedition to Earth, and that this was a legend borrowed from the tales they brought back? Or had some swashbuckling Space Age buccaneers from Earth emigrated to this planet when things became too hot?

He became aware that the Chief was speaking to the pirates in the scooter. "Your task is to get to the store-room with the prisoner," he rapped. "Let him select the tool he needs, then return to the scooter and head for base. . . . No looting, you understand? And no trying to join in the fighting."

The two men nodded sullenly. "Oh, and one more thing," added the Chief. "If the prisoner tries to raise an alarm, or tries to escape—kill him!"

As their chief turned away, the pirates slammed down the domed, transparent top of the scooter. In another moment they were darting out of the exit-tube. The adventure had begun. . . .

Dr Who found the journey exhilarating. The restless green of the deep waters changed to a muted azure as they drifted upwards. The endless panorama of marine life darting around the craft was a source of great excitement to him.



His keen scientific mind turned to consideration of the pirates' underwater base. He decided to try out his guards. He chose the pilot, who was crammed into a bucket seat with his control bar and instruments before him and a wide screen looking forward.

"That base of yours—aren't you afraid it might be discovered?" began Dr Who.

The pilot answered without looking over his shoulder. "You don't think we stay in one place, waiting to be discovered, do you?"

"Well—er—I didn't imagine a huge structure like that could be moved without a great deal of trouble," pondered Dr Who.

The other glanced round sharply then. "Are you laughing at me?"

"No, no! I assure you I am not!" said Dr Who. "But I wish you would tell me how it can be moved."

The pirate behind chipped in: "Have you never heard of a drive unit that uses a controlled hydrogen fusion process to produce steam jets?"

There was a warning shout from the pilot: "Hold on!" He threw his weight on the control bar. The craft heeled over, and its occupants were flattened against the wall.

When he had pulled out of the swerve, the pilot snapped: "They've got sonic feelers out. Just look at the warning light!"

"Shall I shoot them a helio and mix them up a bit?" asked his partner.

"Let them have two—in opposite directions. That will draw them off completely, and give us time to sneak in," said the pilot.

Dr Who craned his neck to see what kind of decoys they were referring to. He felt the solid *Whump* of a high-powered shot beneath his feet, and he glimpsed a quicksilver shape slip away, and then a second one, travelling in the opposite direction.

Relieved of some weight, the scooter spiralled upwards.

"Stand by!" said the pilot.

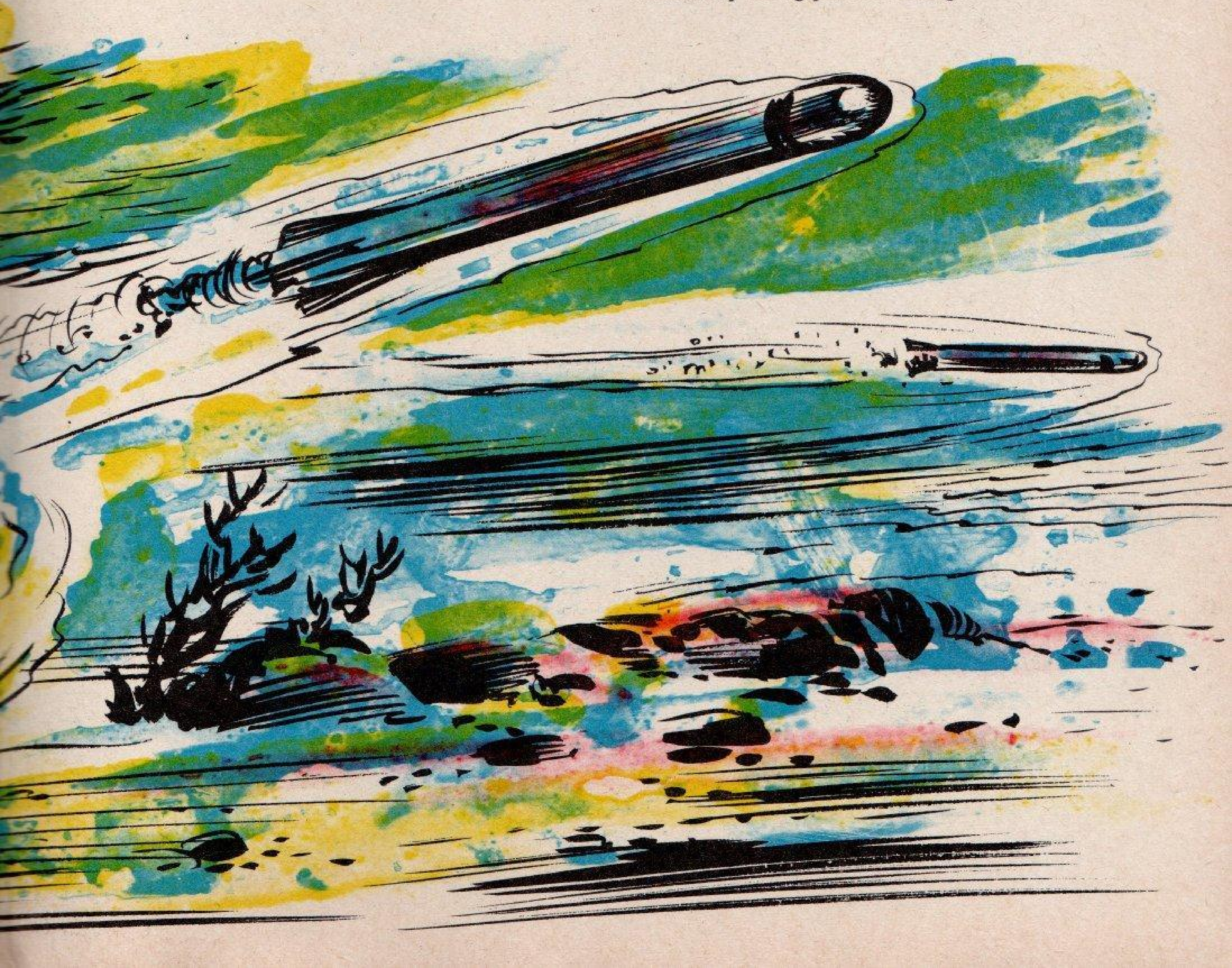
The next moment they had emerged into the twilight upper world of the planet. Apparently they were in some kind of river, close in to the bank and sheltered by a metal bridge which leapt the stream like a silver dart.

The two pirates were on the bank in an instant, and hauling at Dr Who as he prepared to step ashore.

"I am quite capable of alighting by myself!" protested Dr Who.

"Hurry!" snapped the pilot. He was a small man with a chalk-white face. He waved a wicked-looking gun under the prisoner's nose.

Dr Who swallowed his irritation. He followed the others' example, bending low and running cautiously along past the bridge.



Ahead of him Dr Who saw the soaring splinter of metallic structure which balanced the lofty Secretariat building.

There were Landlubber guards everywhere—tall ramrod figures in blue toga-like uniforms and feathered helmets.

But the two pirates were always one move ahead of the opposition. The muzzles of their stun-guns flickered again and again. They ran on, leaving the tall figures frozen in whatever statue-like pose they had been caught.

Now the trio were inside the broad base of the tower.

Dr Who saw that the main body of the pirates had already arrived. Frozen guards stood all around. Two pirates stood guard on the entrance to the hi-lifter which provided the link with the building far above.

The pilot thrust Dr Who rudely towards a door. "Come on!" he snapped.

They slipped through the door, which opened automatically at their approach. A room packed with equipment and shelves lay beyond. This was the store-room, and Dr Who's heart sank as he saw that the second pirate was checking the electro-filing system to locate the imaginary tool he had requested.

"What was the name of that tool again?" demanded the pirate, turning with a frown.

Dr Who hoped he could remember it correctly. "A—er—a Renticular Celluprime, Number Two," he answered.

The man from the sea re-checked the file. An ugly look came over his face. "There is no such tool listed!" he said.

"What do you say?" snapped the pilot. He pushed his companion aside and ran his fingers over the flickering dials. . . .

Dr Who edged towards the door. Suddenly he spotted a Landlubber guard creeping towards the pirates. Fortunately both men were too intent on Dr Who to notice the enemy's approach.

"He's right! There is no such tool!" said the pilot. Both pirates lifted their weapons towards Dr Who.

"Possibly it is listed under another name," began Dr Who desperately.

The pilot opened his mouth to reply. Suddenly he shivered. With his mouth still open, he slid to the floor. The second pirate leapt aside, just in time to avoid the next shot from the Landlubber's gun. The two grappled together, swaying about and knocking over shelves.

Dr Who saw his chance and took it. Boldness, he decided, was the best course now.

With all the nonchalance he could muster, he strolled out past the pirates guarding the hi-lifter. He stepped outside, expecting to feel the searing burn of a shot between his shoulder-blades. But he found himself free.

He began to run back the way he had come. As he did so he heard the swelling impact of sonic explosions behind him. Apparently the pirates' sneak-attack had misfired. Glancing back he saw the great ball of the Secretariat erupting with flash and fire.

He came to the bridge. He ran past it, hoping fervently that he would find the sea-scooter unharmed.

For a moment he failed to find it. Then he saw it, half hidden by clumps of barren stalks. As he climbed aboard and pulled the cover down, he was hoping that he could remember how the pilot had handled the craft.

He ran his eye over the controls. His scientific brain made a rapid assessment of the various switches and dials.

"Ah yes! Nothing very complicated here!" he murmured.

He pressed a switch and the motors came to life. At the same moment there was a tremendous roar and the ground trembled. He stared back at the Secretariat building. It was a mass of searing light. For a few seconds that enormous globe, so intricately engineered, tottered on its springing tower. Then it slowly toppled off, and began to plunge directly towards the bridge.

With frantic haste Dr Who turned the scooter into mid-stream and pressed the controls to submerge. . . .

The sea-scooter submerged not a moment too soon. The wreckage of the shattered building hit the bridge and sprayed the surface of the river with flaming wreckage.

Dr Who felt the scooter thrown about by the shock of the vibrations. He clung to the steering bar. . . .

Then he was in clear water and he knew that he had reached the sea. He went deeper.

But now there was another problem: how to find the pirates' lair again. He searched the ship for a map, or some instructions. He found nothing.

He had slumped despondently in the pilot's seat again, when he spotted a small black instrument tucked under the main panel. It was stamped with the skull and cross bones. In a flash Dr Who guessed that it was a homing device.

He threw the switch. Immediately the scooter went into a controlled course, veering diagonally away from the course which Dr Who had been following.

He settled back in his seat with a chuckle of relief.

"A very useful little device!" he murmured. "Apparently all I have to do is sit here and wait. . . . Well, that gives me time to plan how I can get inside *Tardis* when we reach the base."

It was not long before the dark shape of the seabed citadel loomed up ahead of the scooter. The craft slipped inside and surfaced in the tank. Dr Who climbed out, fully expecting to hear shouts of alarm. But only the hum of motors sounded in that strange place.

The whole base seemed deserted. Apparently most of the pirates had gone to the Shore. But somewhere, Dr Who knew, there must be a guard or two knocking about.

He found his way to the big room with the desk in it. *Tardis* stood as he had left it. Scarcely able to believe his good luck he hurried to the door and slipped the electronic key into the lock.

"Stop!"

A bull-like roar made him glance round. The tattooed guard was scowling at Dr Who. His powerful hands held a ray gun.

Dr Who weighed his chances. He felt the door of *Tardis* move under his hands. . . .

"It is all right, my friend," he said, forcing a smile. "We found the right tool. . . . Ask your Chief—he's right behind you."

It was an old trick; but on this planet, perhaps, it was a new one. At any rate it worked. The pirate glanced over his shoulder.

Dr Who flung himself inside *Tardis.* He rushed to the control panel, pressed the buttons that would close the door against the pirate outside.

"Goodness gracious me!" he gasped as he set the controls. "I only hope this is going to work. I should hate to have to step outside again and face that fellow. I imagine he must be very annoyed."

His sight-screen proved that he was right. It showed the pirate almost dancing with fury, shaking his fists and voicing his threats as he found his weapon of no avail against the 'box of treasure'.

Then the screen showed only the grey of the intra-dimensional flux. Dr Who could not repress a cheer.

"Everything is all right again!" he smiled, locking the controls and mopping his brow. "But this must definitely be a lesson to me. I should never go anywhere without a Renticular Cellupríme, Number Two!"